THE CONCEALED ART OF THE SOUL

Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology



JONARDON GANERI

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If truth be at all within the reach of human capacity, 'tis certain it must lie very deep and abtruse.

—*DAVID HUME*

Though it be a maxim of the schools that there is no love of a thing unkown, yet I have found that things unknown have a secret influence on the soul.

—*THOMAS TRAHERNE*

This 'I' is not intimate with itself through and through, but is opaque, and therefore remains a riddle to itself.

—*ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER*

The author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character 'I' as if to conceal him, not having to name him or describe him more than this stark pronoun.

—*ITALO CALVINO*

Every profound spirit needs a mask.

—*FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE*

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Introduction

Among the philosophers of classical India, some speak of a possibility we should not and indeed cannot ignore. It is the possibility that we have got it wrong about the relationship between ourselves and the world; it is the possibility that we are massively, colossally, in error about the world we inhabit and the nature of that inhabitation, about our station in the world of things, about our lives, hopes and destinies. These Indians are not prophets of doom: they do not say that the mistake we have made is a catastrophic one. Indeed, it is barely noticeable—things go on, things work out, more or less, by and large. The mistake we have made is not catastrophic but tragic. Its tragedy lies in the fact that there are lives to be led that are so much better, so much more to the point, than the ones we do in fact lead, lives not inaccessible but merely hidden, lying just out of view. We are like Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn in *The African Queen,* exhausting ourselves in the effort to shove our home-made boat along the meandering gullies, made blind by that very effort to the great ocean just over the bank. We inhabit a world we do not know. We sleepwalk, now here, now there, alongside a silent and forgotten destiny.

Hidden: metaphors of concealment suffuse the Indian debate. The truth is covered, clothed, wrapped up, enveloped, concealed; Sanskrit verbs of concealment include *nihnu* ('to hide, conceal; to deny, dissimulate'), *āvṛ* ('to cover, hide, conceal'), *guh* ('to cover, hide, conceal, keep secret'), *pracchad* ('to cover, wrap up, veil, envelop; to hide, conceal, disguise, keep secret'), and many more. Sometimes myths embody abstract ideas, and for the Indians a myth of concealment is primal: 'Indra is the invincible power of breaking through, shattering obstacles, overcoming concealment. With him is associated the primal myth of the Indian tradition, the killing of the dragon Vṛtra, which names literally the force that covers and hides, blocks and thwarts.'[1] Killing the dragon Vṛtra, overcoming concealment, is the function of what I will call a 'practice of truth'.

[1] J. L. Mehta, 'The Ṛgveda: text and interpretation', in his *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: Indian Council for Philosophical Research, 1990), pp. 282–3.

Above all else, it is the self that is concealed, or the truth about the self. Heidegger's thought is that Being conceals itself, indeed that:

'vacillating self-concealment' is a name for Being itself ... Being is not merely hidden; it withdraws and conceals itself. From this we derive an essential insight: the clearing, in which beings are, is not simply bounded and delimited by something hidden but by something self-concealing.[2]

For the Indians, the Being for which this is true is the self (for the Greeks, as Pierre Hadot notes, it is Nature). We are in self-imposed error, the Buddha said, when we think that our everyday pleasures are not in reality pains, concealing from us the universality of suffering—the fact of concealment underwrites the first of the Four Great Truths. We are in error too about the cause of that suffering, the attachment to a self that's not there to be found. The Upaniṣads likewise suggest to us that we have got it wrong about something very important:

Take, for example, a hidden treasure of gold. People who do not know the terrain, even when they pass right over it time and again, would not discover it. In exactly the same way, all these creatures, even though they go there every day, do not discover this world of *brahman*, for they are led astray by the false. (CU 8.3.1–2)

Mistakes about the place that an idea of self should hold in our mental lives run deep, however, and the 'cure' for our misconceptions is never simply to *announce* the right view. The early texts, therefore, resort to other means. They do not simply announce; they find subtle strategies and indirect methods to help the reader undercut their false sense of self: techniques of graded instruction, embedded and contextualized description, literary devices of disguise and deceit, the use of figures and characterizations. As Martha Nussbaum has said, a philosophy that aims at therapy for the soul 'will often need to search for techniques that are more complicated and indirect, more psychologically engaging, than those of conventional deductive and dialectical argument. It must find ways to delve into the pupil's inner world'.[3] In particular, the tropes of reluctance and secrecy in the Upaniṣads, and likewise the use of metaphors and parables in the

[2] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 178–9. I thank Joseph Sen for this reference.

[3] Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 35.

Nikāya, encourage the reader to rework their understanding of self, a reworking that takes the form of an uncovering of what is already there rather than the creation of something altogether new. One theorist will claim, perhaps ambitiously, that this is even the hidden purpose of the epic *Mahābhārata*, whose author, Vyāsa, 'shows that the primary aim of his work has been to produce a disenchantment with the world and that he has intended his primary subject to be liberation and the *rasa* of peace'.[4] How texts like these can guide their readers to such a goal—not least through their depictions of the figures of the Buddha, the Upaniṣadic sage, and the epic hero—is my topic in Part I, and I won't forget Nietzsche's warning about soul doctors of every sort: 'All preachers of morality, as also all theologians, have a bad habit in common: all of them try to persuade man that he is very ill, and that a severe, final, radical cure is necessary.'[5]

If their pedagogic ambitions prevent the early texts from simply announcing it, can we nevertheless extract from them what is, in fact, the truth about the self? In Part II, I'll look for solutions to this exegetical puzzle among the Mādhyamika Buddhists and the Advaita Vedānta Hindus who flourished in India in the middle centuries of the first millennium. The Mādhyamikas remind us that the Buddha may not always have talked plainly but he always spoke with compassion. That can serve as a principle of charity in interpretation, allowing the philosopher to work back from what he *said* to what he *thought*. If the Buddha's words are medicinal, we might hope not only for a cure, but also for a diagnosis, and a description of the healthy condition towards which we strive. For a doctor's selection of medicine is guided by their knowledge of anatomy, and we want to infer the anatomy of self from the Buddha's choice of treatments (what must a healthy self be, if *these* are the medicines one needs to swallow?). Mādhyamika philosophers argue that there is a frightening truth concealed by the Buddha's skilfully uttered everyday words, the truth that all things, we included, are empty of substantial nature.

The startling idea of the Hindu Vedāntins, again, is that the way out of colossal error is to embed within the illusion the catalyst of its own

[4] Ānandavardhana. *The Dvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana with the Locana of Abhinavagupta*, trans. Daniel H. H. Ingalls, J. M. Masson and M. V. Patwardhan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 690.

[5] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §326: 'On soul doctors and pain'.

destruction. The Upaniṣad is a 'Trojan text', a false gift that will blow up in the mind of its recipient, destroying the error of which it too is a part. It is a false vehicle with a true content. Here I will introduce the idea of a 'procedural use of reason', that application of reason and argument that levers one out of error, itself a practice of truth. It will seem that what one needs is to be able to *appreciate* a text, as one does a painting; if the text or the painting then turns out to be a fake, and can be seen to be so as a result of one's appreciation of it having done its inner work, does that really matter so much?[6]

The chapters in Part II both deal with philosophical implications of the performative and transformative aspects of an interaction with the written or spoken word, and an appropriate subtitle might have been *How To Do Things with Texts*. It will emerge that, although the philosophical doctrines of these two schools are in sharp contrast, their philosophical *methods* share common ground. Both agree above all that philosophical inquiry and the practices of truth are also arts of the soul, ways of cultivating impartiality, self-control, steadiness of mind, toleration, and non-violence.

What, then, can be said about self, if it is indeed possible to discover the truth? In Part III I will distinguish four views. Two are realist: non-reductive realism and reductionism. Two are irrealist: the error-theoretic view and the non-factualist view. The first of these views appears in various guises, of which the Cartesian View is one and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika View is another. Reductionism will be taken very seriously, and we will have occasion to ask not only if the Buddha was the first reductionist but also if any later Buddhists have a defensible version to offer. Of the two irrealist views about the self, one will have been encountered already, for I claim in the first chapter that the Upaniṣads present to us a sophisticated non-factualist theory about the self. Here I disagree, controversially, with the school of Advaita Vedānta, which unravels from those same texts an error-theoretic view. Finally, in the last chapter I will consider the merits

[6] Such practices would include the exercises named by the Greeks *anagnosis* and *akroasis*, that is, 'reading' and 'listening'. See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 84, 86. The Indians, however, have a particular understanding of the purpose and mode of operation of these exercises, and give them a great centrality, for reasons that are related to what Sheldon Pollock has called a 'fundamental postulate' of Indian intellectual history, that *śāstra* ('theory') necessarily precedes and governs *prayoga* ('practical activity'); see his 'The theory of practice and the practice of theory in Indian intellectual history', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985): 499–519.

of a second non-factualist proposal, one put to us in the school of Buddhist Madhyamaka. They claim that there is nothing more to the self than what it does: the self is an activity. Borrowing a distinction from William James and David Velleman, I will suggest that as a theory of perspectival selfhood, this view is compatible with reductionism in the account of metaphysical personal identity.

Errors that involve the self run deep, and one of the deepest, all our authors seem to tell us, has to do with the way we draw boundaries around minds. That seems to be the hardest problem, the point where we most frequently go wrong, either by thinking it is too easy or else suspecting that it is too hard. An early modern Indian author said that in the end it all comes down to this: some of the ancients thought there is just one self, others that there are none. The kernel of truth in this remark lies in the fact that these ancients agreed that achieving a less involved, less embedded, sense of self was proper work for philosophy. What this consists in, and how it is to be achieved, depends on what one takes a self to be. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed a re-emergence of realism and a new interest in the problem of the individuation of distinct selves. I will be able to comment only very briefly here on this tremendously exciting period of innovation.

This book, then, is the story of an extended philosophical inquiry, one that had as its end an acknowledgement of the truth about the self, and took for its means a creative investigation through canonical texts. My own 'point of view' as an author is different in each of the three Parts. In Part I my standpoint is that of a participant located 'inside' the texts. I try to be engaged, open, receptive to the distinct understanding of self and world each of these texts instils. In Part II I view the texts from a point of view that lies 'outside' them. I look upon the texts as well-crafted vehicles, examples of a complex philosophical genre that aims at self-transformation in the reader. In Part III, still 'outside' the text, I move from a view of them as vehicles to a perspective in which I consider them as the bearers of content, a content consisting in fascinating philosophical theory about the nature of self. I have arranged the three Parts in sequence, but not because I think there is a progression from one perspective to the next. Indeed, just the opposite: I think that each of the three perspectives (reader, critic, philosopher) needs constantly to be borne in mind. In the course of studying the materials upon which this book is based I have come to the

firm conclusion that we cannot fully understand our subject if we adopt any one of these three points of view to the exclusion of the other two, or give it more weight, or less, than it is due. To do that would be a pity, because then the sheer sophistication of the Indian philosophical texts, the deliberate shifting interplay between vehicle and content, between literary form and conceptual matter, would go unnoticed.

I place the Mādhyamika view last because it requires that much more than the others to set it up. What is involved in 'setting up' a view? I have found it worthwhile to attempt in this book to create, insofar as I can, a proper *philosophical* context for the views I examine. In particular, I think it is important that we have in mind the *Indian* context of the Indian Buddhist philosophers of the self, and that means, in part, the intellectual context that the great Indian epics, not to mention the Upaniṣads and other philosophical works, sustain. These would have been extremely familiar to the Buddhist philosophers of our period: they properly contextualize the discussion of Indian Buddhism.[7] I say this and at the same time have enormous respect for the tradition of Tibetan hermeneutics, and for the intellectual culture that these self-same Buddhists helped to create when they later were to become philosopher-refugees. Candrakīrti, whose view I will discuss at some length, was to become a pivotal figure in Tibet.

It seems to me that it is a sign of the enormous philosophical strength of the earliest texts that they are able to sustain such a range of philosophical speculation about the self. They are a constant resource to which the later tradition could continually return when in need of inspiration. Their role in a dynamic tradition is to provide stimulation, not justification, in philosophical inquiry and in the development of new conceptual and normative paradigms. That is to say, they are better understood as 'source' texts rather as 'proof' texts, the back-reference within the tradition having a function similar to that of a *ressourcement*.[8] One way they fulfil this role is to be, as Aloka Parasher-Sen has put it, 'texts within which were left deliberate, open spaces for interpretation'.[9] Another is to have many

[7] John Dunne's discussion of 'commentarial strata' is helpful and relevant here; see the Introduction to his *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004).

[8] See Marcellino D'Ambrosio, 'Ressourcement theology, aggiornamento, and the hermeneutics of tradition', *Communio* 18/4 (1991): 530–55.

[9] Aloka Parasher-Sen, 'The margins in historical consciousness', *Summerhill: IIAS Review* 4/2 (1998): 12. See further the discussion at the end of chapter 7.

chronological strata, many authorial voices, many recensions. When the later tradition does cite an early text in order to justify an innovation, it still does not take the form of an argument from authority. Dynamic traditions of thought are governed by a principle of *proleptic* unity, a later innovation being judged a proper development of the tradition, and not a corruption, if it is in agreement with the underlying principles of the tradition. Often, tacit agreement between the innovation and the underlying principle will be confirmed by the appearance of that innovation much earlier on in the tradition, albeit in an inchoate and undeveloped form.[10] This earlier 'anticipation' may not stand in any causal relationship with the later innovation; indeed the source of the innovation might be entirely external to the tradition. The reference back to the early texts serves to confirm that the innovation, whatever its origins, counts as a consistent development of the tradition itself. The early texts do exactly what they themselves say they are doing, that is, nourishing a profound investigation into the self and the deep errors about it we are prone to fall into. But by their own admission, it is not their job to perform the investigation for us; nor could they succeed even if they tried. These concepts of *ressourcement*, anticipation and intratextual 'open spaces', along with an acknowledgement of the importance of intellectual context and authorial perspective, create a methodological framework within which I will be interpreting the Indian tradition of philosophical thought about truth, concealment and self.

Some of the Indian ideas I discuss in this book had more of a taste for adventure than others. Of the ones that did, a few chose to travel along often tortuous paths, sometimes reaching Europe. The Upaniṣadic idea that the self is not an object was transmitted to Schopenhauer, who read the Latin rendering of a Persian translation, and from him via Wittgenstein to Sidney Shoemaker. The Buddha's ideas about selflessness and emptiness, as well as stories about his teaching methods, found their way to China, from where, with the help of the Jesuit missionaries, they entered that 'arsenal' of the Enlightenment, the *Dictionaire historique et critique* of Pierre Bayle, a book plundered by many Enlightenment thinkers including, notably, David Hume. An idea that is, perhaps, a little too well-travelled, the doctrine of *karma*, is one whose obscure origins lie in the question of self-constitution

[10] This is one of John Newman's most important ideas about the nature of dynamic moral traditions: J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845; reprinted London: Longmans Green, 1890), pp. 195–6.

through action. In the appendices, I have included brief discussions of some of the ideas encountered in the body of the book that have more stamps in their passports than others.

Some of my own material has been around a bit too. Versions of chapter 1 were read to the Greater Philadelphia Philosophy Consortium, November 2003, and at the Philosophy Department, Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur, November 2004. I thank Frank Hoffman, Bijoy Barua, and both audiences. Parts of chapter 2 are heavily revised from my article 'Why truth? The *snake sūtra*', in *Contemporary Buddhism* 3/2 (2002): 127–39. I thank Clare Carlisle and Michael McGhee for their comments. Some parts of chapter 3 have appeared in Federico Squarcini (ed.), *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2006), and some in Chong Kim Chong and Yuli Liu (eds), *Conceptions of Virtue East and West* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2006). I thank Federico Squarcini, Chong Kim Chong and Yuli Liu. I also thank John Brockington for his comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, as well as an audience at the IIT Delhi. Early versions of chapter 4 were presented at Sharpham College, Devon, June 2004, and the Centre for Buddhist and Tibetan Studies at the University of Bristol, March 2005. I am grateful to Paul Williams, Rupert Gethin, Steve Palmer, John Peakcocke, and the members of both audiences. Parts of chapter 5 derive from my article 'Can error lead to truth? The procedural epistemology of Maṇḍanamiśra', in Srinivasa Rao and Godavarish Mishra (eds), *Paramparā: Essays in Honour of R. Balasubramanian* (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 2004), pp. 167–77. I thank Godavarish Miśra and Srinivasa Rao. Earlier versions of some of the material in chapter 6 were read at a meeting of The Philadelphia Oriental Club, May 2004, and at the Gresham College London Seminar, 'The Idea of the "Self" in Different Cultures', June 2004. I am grateful to Harunaga Isaacson, Richard Sorabji, Arindam Chakrabarti, Mark Siderits and Alex Watson for their helpful comments. Chapter 7 has its origins in a paper read at an Oxford seminar on the self, organized by Richard Sorabji, Hilary Term, 2003. I thank the other participants, especially Irena Kupreeva and Pauliina Remes. Some parts of that paper were published as 'An irrealist theory of self', *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* XII (Spring 2004): 61–80. Other parts derive from a talk given at a conference in honour of the great scholar of Madhyamaka, T. R. V. Murti, in Varanasi, January 2003, and I thank the

members of the audience there, especially Ashok Aklujkar and Arindam Chakrabarti.

I feel embarrassed about the amount of help I have received in writing this book. Richard Sorabji not only invited me to give talks at two of his seminars, one in Oxford and one at Gresham College in London, talks which transformed themselves into what are now chapters 6 and 7, but he also offered very encouraging comment. The germ of the book, what the Indians would call the *bīja*, lies in a year spent as the Spalding Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge, in 2001. Julius Lipner told me something quite outrageous: he said it was a year I should take just to *think*. I did exactly that, and I wasn't even expected to submit a report detailing 'outcomes' at the end of it. I must thank the Spalding Trust for the spirit of true scholarship they foster. While in Cambridge, I had the great good fortune to be able to read with Eivind Kahrs Kumārila's chapter on the self, his astonishing felicity with the text opening my eyes to its many secrets. The following year I was able to spend a semester teaching at the University of Chicago. Mathew Kapstein, Wendy Doniger and Rick Rosengarten were all very kind, as were two visitors from other parts of the States, Mark Siderits and Arindam Chakrabarti. I benefitted greatly from my students' incisive observations, especially Andrew Nicholson, Karin Meyers, Geoffrey Ashton, Lesley Cushner, Jeff Bell and Ajay Rao. Back in the UK, I continued to work on the ideas at the University of Liverpool, where my colleagues in the philosophy department, headed then by Michael McGhee, have worked hard to preserve an environment where philosophy can be pursued as it should be. Colleagues in neighbouring universities in the north-west have been good to talk with, especially Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad in Lancaster. A sabbatical year divided between the University of Pennsylvania and Jawaharlal Nehru University proved to be very helpful, the library at Penn being the most extraordinary resource for Indian Studies I have yet encountered, matched only by the dedication to philosophy I found in Delhi. I thank Michael Meister, Charles Kahn, Harunaga Isaacson and George Cardona at Penn, and Manidipa Sen, Franson Manjali, Priyadarshi Jetly and Gurpreeth Mahajan in Delhi. Thanks too to the students who participated in my graduate seminar at Penn in Fall 2003, especially Sheetal Chhabria, Edward Epsen, Nolan Shenai and Vijay Chauhan. The AHRC kindly granted me a Research Leave Award to make this year possible. Two anonymous readers for OUP

not only supplied me with detailed, informative, comment, but helped me as well to see how to restructure the book, very much for the better. Joseph Sen and Christopher Minkowski looked through the revised typescript for me, much to its benefit. I would like to thank the commissioning editor at OUP, Peter Momtchiloff, the copy-editor Helen Gray, and the typesetting team.

I have have been very fortunate to be a part of a project, run by Sheldon Pollock at Columbia University, that is investigating the astonishing innovations in Sanskrit intellectual culture that were happening between 1550 CE and 1750 CE, just on the eve of the colonial period in India's history. Participating in this project has helped me to refine my ideas about the proper methods for studying the history of Indian philosophical theory, and I am grateful to its other members, Dominik Wujastyk, Karin Preisendanz, Madhav Deshpande, Larry McCrea, Christopher Minkowski, Yigal Bronner, Johannes Bronkhorst, Garry Tubb and Sudipta Kaviraj. One of our meetings, convened at the Association of Asian Studies in New York in March 2003, fell on the very day that war broke out in Iraq. I must express my gratitude to the more than two hundred delegates who, on that day, signed the petition I organized in opposition to the war.

It goes without saying that those who are familiar with the work of my teacher, Bimal Krishna Matilal, will see his influence and inspiration running throughout this book. My friend Joseph Sen has been a source of very concrete information about texts and authors I had not been so familiar with. Amber Carpenter helped me to see how much those working on the Indian materials can learn from the best of Greek scholarship, in terms both of content and, perhaps even more importantly, method. My brother, Robindra, helped me towards an understanding of Rāmānuja, and my sister, Anita, enjoyed translating for me the gruesome story about body-swapping with which this book concludes. My father, Puranmal Ganeriwala, who passed away while this book was being written, was the most philosophical of them all, with a sprinkling of Stoic tranquillity, a measure of Buddhist serenity, a smattering of the mischievous Kṛṣṇa, and a good medicinal dose of common sense. This is for him.

Jonardon Ganeri
July 2006

PART I

Soul-searchers and Sooth-sayers

1

Hidden in the Cave: The Upaniṣadic Self

The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious.

Wittgenstein, *Notebooks*, 1914–16

1.1 The reluctance of the sage

The recalcitrant sages of the Upaniṣads[1] are coy but not covert. They do not, in general, conceal their true beliefs with false words; they are not insincere. Tardiness not trickery is their leading trait, an immense reluctance to 'spill the beans', a coyness rooted not so much in a self-serving secretiveness or a disinclination to share the knowledge that gives them power,[2] but which exists rather as a response to a deep respect for the power of that knowledge, and a recognition of the need not to be frivolous either with the knowledge itself or with its potential recipients. Yājñavalkya, certainly, has about him a degree of furtiveness when he replies to Āryabhāga's demand to be told

[1] All references are to the edition and translation of Patrick Olivelle: *The Early Upaniṣads: An Annotated Text and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Another recent translation, Valerie J. Roebuck's *The Upanisads* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), is also excellent. On the chronology, Olivelle says that, 'any dating of these documents that attempts a precision closer than a few centuries is as stable as a pack of cards' (p. 12). The current consensus is that the prose Bṛhadāraṇyaka [BU] and Chāndogya [CU] are the oldest, and pre-Buddhist; they are also edited texts with different chronological strata, but roughly seventh to sixth centuries BCE. The other three prose Upaniṣads, Taittirīya [TU], Aitareya [AU] and Kauṣītaki [KsU], are probably pre-Buddhist too, and sixth to fifth centuries BCE. Of the more theistic verse Upaniṣads, the order is probably Kena [KeU], Kaṭha [KaU], Īśā [IU], Śvetāśvatara [SU] and Muṇḍaka [MuU], and the date somewhere in the last few centuries BCE. Recent work on the date of the Buddha's death has recommended between 375 and 355 BCE in place of the usually cited 486 BCE.

[2] The prominent exception is SU 6.22: 'This supreme secret was proclaimed during a former age in the Vedānta. One should never disclose it to a person who is not of a tranquil disposition, or who is not one's own son or pupil.'

what happens to a man after he dies: 'My friend, we cannot talk about this in public; let's go and discuss it in private' (BU 3.3.2); or when in response to Janaka's persistent questioning, he panics, thinking, 'The king is really sharp! He has flushed me out of every cover' (BU 4.3.33); or when, having tried to palm off Uṣasta Cākrāyaṇa with a cryptic account of the self, Uṣasta exclaims: 'That's a fine explanation! It's like saying "This is a cow and that is a horse!" Come on, give me a real explanation ... of the self that is within all' (BU 3.4.2). But even he displays the more typical mood when he cracks under Gārgī's prolonged interrogation: 'Don't ask too many questions, Gārgī, or your head will shatter apart! You are asking too many questions about a deity about whom one should not ask too many questions. So, Gārgī, do not ask too many questions!' (BU 3.6.1). The sage's reluctance is born not of subterfuge but frustration and, perhaps, fear.

Good use is made of the trope of the reluctant sage by the Upaniṣadic storyteller: to engender in the reader a sense of respect for the profundity of the wisdom about to be imparted, as well as to convey the idea that a gift is being given and a very precious one at that. More particularly, though, the reluctant sage is made to speak as one who is having his arm twisted, and the whole tone is 'Look, I didn't want to tell you this, but you have forced me to.' The reluctant sage seems with his reluctance to want to divest himself of responsibility, implying that the pupil alone is responsible for whatever consequences may follow the disclosure. Often indeed it is the virtuosity of the pupil that elicits this disclosure, an exceptional feat of endurance or ascetiscism, an uncanny disinterest in the pleasures of life. Virtuosity, but not necessarily virtuousness—it is not so much the moral worthiness of the pupil that turns the trick, but their apparent willingness to sacrifice all, their readiness to accept the consequences without complaint. For then the sage can truly think 'You took this upon yourself—don't blame me!'

Reluctance and fear are clearly intertwined in the story of Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa. We learn from *Ṛgveda* 1.116.12 of a sage Dadhyañc who has discovered the secret truth called the 'honey-doctrine' and who is sworn to secrecy by Indra, with the threat that if he were to disclose this doctrine Indra would cut off his head. The Aśvins want the secret but also know that Dadhyañc will not risk his neck to divulge it. They hit upon the following brilliant contrivance: they themselves cut off Dadhyañc's head and replace it with the head of a horse. Now, when Dadhyañc reveals the secret and Indra severs his horse's head, the Aśvins can restore to him his

original form—so that he will have revealed the secret and still evaded Indra's wrath! This is the story alluded to in the following verse:

> As thunder discloses the rain, O Heroes,
> I disclose that wonderful skill you displayed for gain;
> When Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa revealed the honey,
> Through the horse's head to you.
>
> You fixed a horse's head, O Aśvins,
> On Dadhyañc Ātharvaṇa;
> True to his word, O mighty ones,
> He revealed to you Tvaṣṭṛ's honey,
> That remains a secret with you.
>
> (BU 2.5.16–17)

With the head substitution the Aśvins displayed a 'wonderful skill' indeed, an ingenuity that diffused Indra's threat and coaxed the reluctant Dadhyañc into revealing to them the honey-truth, a doctrine about the self that is the honey of all beings. Not that he had any objection in principle to telling them, nor did they trick him into an indiscretion—it was fear alone that held Dadhyañc's tongue.

Let's next take up the story of Naciketas, the retelling of which in the Kaṭha Upaniṣad develops earlier renditions in *Ṛgveda* 10.135 and *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.11.8.1–6.[3] The kernel of the story is the lecture Naciketas receives from Yama on the topic of the self. The framing narrative tells how Yama came, reluctantly, to be giving that lecture. The pious boy Naciketas watches as his father performs the *sarvamedha* or 'sacrifice of all', a ritual in which one gives away all one's most important things as sacrificial gifts. Naciketas notices that the cows being given are not, in fact, the best; indeed 'they have been milked dry, they are totally barren—"joyless" are called the worlds to which a man goes who gives *them* as gifts' (KaU 1.3). Perhaps it is with the intention of exposing his father's hypocrisy that Naciketas then asks to whom he, Naciketas, will be given, and he twice repeats the question until his father yells back 'I'll give you to Death!' (KaU 1.4). With equanimity Naciketas accepts his fate and goes to the abode of Yama, the god of death, where he remains without food for three days waiting for Yama to return. Yama is conscious that he has shown a Brahmin great

[3] See H. D. Velankar, 'The Ṛgvedic origin of the story of Naciketas', in *Mélanges d'Indianisme à la Mémoire de Louis Renou* (Paris: Éditions e. de Boccard, 1968), pp. 763–72.

disrespect in allowing him to stay at his home without hospitality and therefore grants Naciketas three wishes of his own choosing. In the Taittirīya rendition, but not in the Kaṭha, there is a suggestion that Naciketas tricked Yama, deliberately choosing to arrive when he knew Yama would be away, thereby manufacturing the obligation, and indeed that he did this on the advice of his repentant father. Be that as it may, the three gifts Naciketas asked for were to be allowed to return home to his now pacified father, to be told how to perform effectively the fire-altar ritual and render permanent its results, and finally to be told what happens to a man after he dies:

> There is this doubt about a man who is dead.
> 'He exists,' say some; others, 'He exists not.'
> I want to know this, so please teach me.
> This is the third of my three wishes.
>
> (KaU 1.20)

Of the three wishes, Yama executes the first without hesitation, assuring Naciketas that he will return home to a father who will be affable in the future. Yama also delivers the second wish without fuss, explaining the method of constructing the fire-altar and adding that this fire-altar will henceforth bear the name 'Naciketas'. When it comes to the third wish, however, Yama is suddenly reluctant:

> As to this even the gods of old had doubts,
> for it's hard to understand, it's a subtle doctrine.
> Make, Naciketas, another wish.
> Do not press me! Release me from this.
>
> (KaU 1.21)

> Choose sons and grandsons who'd live a hundred years!
> Plenty of livestock and elephants, horses and gold!
> Choose as your domain a wide expanse of earth!
> And you yourself live as many autumns as you wish!
>
> (KaU 1.23)

> And if you would think this is an equal wish:
> You may choose wealth together with a long life;
> Achieve prominence, Naciketas, in this wide world;
> And I will make you enjoy your desires at will.
>
> (KaU 1.24)

You may ask freely for all those desires,
Hard to obtain in this mortal world;
Look at these lovely girls, with chariots and lutes,
Girls of this sort are unobtainable by men—
I'll give them to you; you'll have them wait on you;
But about death please don't ask me, Naciketas.

(KaU 1.25)

Yama's extreme reluctance to speak of death has a beseeching, desperate note, but of what can he be so afraid? Is it that Yama, the god of death, is being forced to speak about himself, to tell the secret of his own name? For Naciketas is certainly right that if even the gods of old had doubts about the matter then no one but Death himself is fit to explain it (KaU 1.22). Yama bribes, cajoles, implores Naciketas but in the end cannot refuse him. The culminative effect of the frame narrative is to box Yama into a corner where he has no option but to give his speech in spite of all his trepidation. Whether or not he has been deceived, his unwillingness to break the laws of good custom and indeed his own word, finally outweighs his immense reluctance to speak. Yama compliments Naciketas on his wisdom and steadfastness (KaU 2.1–11) and begins his discourse on the self.

A third example of Upaniṣadic reluctance is met with in the famous story about Indra and Virocana, in Chāndogya 8.7.1–8.12.6. The gods and demons both have heard tell that Prajāpati speaks of a self 'by discovering which one obtains all the worlds, and all one's desires are fulfilled' (CU 8.7.2). Like two polar explorers, the god Indra and the demon Virocana set out carrying firewood and live as celibates in Prajāpati's presence. Thirty-two years later Prajāpati finally asks them what they want, and being told of their quest to discover the self he fobs them off with an answer he knows to be false:

'Look at yourselves in a pan of water. And let me know if there is anything you do not perceive about yourselves.' So they looked into a pan of water.

Prajāpati asked them: 'What do you see?' And they replied: 'Sir, we see here our entire body (*ātman*), a perfect likeness down to the very hairs of the body, down to the very nails.'

Prajāpati told them then: 'Adorn yourself beautifully, dress well, and spruce yourself up, and then look into a pan of water.' So they adorned themselves beautifully, dressed well, and spruced themselves up, and then looked into a pan of water.

Prajāpati asked them: 'What do you see?' And they replied: 'Sir, as the two of us here are beautifully adorned, well dressed, and all spruced up, in exactly the same way are these, sir, beautifully adorned, well dressed, and all spruced up.'

'That is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*,' Prajāpati told them. And the two of them left with contented hearts.

Seeing the two depart, Prajāpati observed: 'There they go, without learning about the self, without discovering the self!'

(CU 8.8.1–4).

To his credit, Indra soon realizes that the mirrored self cannot be the self for which he seeks (CU 8.9.1—he realizes that if the external appearance can be made beautiful, so too can it become lame and crippled), and he returns for further instruction. Prajāpati makes him wait another thirty-two years and then tries to fob him off again, this time with 'The one who goes happily about in a dream—that is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*' (CU 8.10.1). Indra falls for it a second time but again returns unconvinced. He is again told to wait thirty-two years and is then once more fobbed off, with 'When one is fast asleep, totally collected and serene, and sees no dreams—that is the self; that is the immortal, that is the one free from fear; that is *brahman*' (CU 8.11.1). Indra goes away happy, again returning when he realizes his error. Prajāpati now says 'I will explain it to you further, but only under the following condition—stay here for another five years' (CU 8.11.3). Indra waits and his patience is finally rewarded.

But what are we to make of Prajāpati's astonishing reluctance, of his willingness to deceive not just the demon Virocana but Indra too, of his insistence on long periods of harsh living as a condition for receiving his instruction? And why did Indra believe Prajāpati's final answer, when he might well by now have wondered whether he was not simply being fobbed off one more time? Indra is not doing anything that might better ready him for the new revelation during the long years; indeed the only times he seems to improve his understanding are when he goes away content and then begins to question; in short, when he is *not* at Prajāpati's home. There is, to be sure, a graded teaching about the nature of the self in this Upaniṣadic story, and it is very successful as pedagogic narrative. Indeed, careful attention to narrative form here gives much insight into the nature of the 'self-knowledge' being sought. What is remarkable is the literary

device used here, in which progressively more sophisticated accounts of the self are presented as the grudging concessions of a recalcitrant god. Indra passes through a sequence of doctrines about the self, each one being an improvement on its predecessor, and perhaps one of the things the story is teaching us is that some such procession is necessary in the quest for self-knowledge. Among two doctrines or propositions, let us say that the first is a 'preparatory condition' for the second if understanding that the first is *false* is required of someone who is to be in a position even to speculate upon the truth or falsity of the second.[4] Indra could not begin even to appreciate the virtues of the less obvious doctrine that the true self is the self one encounters in a dream had he not already understood as wrong the more obvious idea about the true self being the body's reflected image or one's appearance to others. And now Prajāpati's reluctance might be seen as following from a further idea, that for one doctrine about the self to be a preparatory condition of another, it must not merely be understood that it is false, but this understanding must be the result of one's own personal investigation and discovery.[5] If that is so, then Prajāpati could not have told Indra the final doctrine straight away, nor could he have told him that any of the preceding doctrines was false. He could only 'feed' Indra a preparatory doctrine and wait to see if Indra discovers it to be false. Prajāpati's reluctance, then, is of a different order than the fearful silence of Dadhyañc or the cautious reserve of Yama; it is a reluctance born of didactic necessity when what is being taught is the nature of the self.

If we compare the Upaniṣadic representation of the sage with Plato's representation of Socrates, we see that the sage's reluctance is no ordinary reluctance. Rather, it is a feigned (perhaps even ironic) reluctance, designed to encourage and motivate the hearer or reader in the direction of a quest for the truth, a concealed truth about a hidden self. To borrow a term from Kierkegaard, the persona of the reluctant sage is a literary device for the 'indirect communication' of a truth about the soul.[6] Later in this book,

[4] A preparatory condition is thus the inverse of a presupposition, something that must be *true* for the sentence presupposing it to be evaluable as either true or false.

[5] It is said more than once that 'This self cannot be grasped by teachings or by intelligence or even by great learning' (KaU 2.23; MuU 3.2.3). But compare KaU 2.8, which seems to assert precisely the opposite: 'Yet one cannot gain access to it, unless someone else teaches it. For it is smaller than the size of an atom, a thing beyond the realm of reason.'

[6] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

I will compare Prajāpati's approach to teaching about the self with that of the Buddha (see chapter 4).

1.2 Metaphors of the cave

And what did reluctant Yama, the lord of death, tell Naciketas? He told him of the existence of a hidden self, a self the discovery of which will free a man from grief and sorrow. He told him of a self that lies 'hidden in the cave' (*nihito guhāyām*):

> Finer than the finest, larger than the largest,
> is the self that lies here hidden
> in the cave of a living being.
> Without desires and free from sorrow,
> a man perceives by the creator's grace
> the grandeur of the self.
>
> (KaU 2.20)

The metaphor of the cave as the hiding place of the soul is to be repeated several times in the Kaṭha (2.12, 3.1), and other Upaniṣads appeal to the same formula:

> Truth and knowledge,
> The infinite and *brahman*:
> A man who knows them as
> hidden in the cave,
> hidden in the highest heaven;
> Attains all his desires,
> together with the wise *brahman*.
>
> (TU 2.1.1)

> It is large, heavenly, of inconceivable form;
> yet it appears more minute than the minute.
> It is farther than the farthest,
> yet it is here at hand;
> It is right here within those who see,
> hidden within the cave.
>
> (MuU 3.1.7)

What is this cave wherein the self hides? The metaphor is absent from the two earliest Upaniṣads—Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya—which speak instead of a 'space within the heart' (*hṛdaya ākāśaḥ*), and that is not a metaphor but an important element of early Upaniṣadic physiology and psychology. Patrick Olivelle (p. 23) has summarized well the older view:

The heart has a cavity at the centre and is surrounded by the pericardium. Channels or veins run from the heart to the pericardium and to other parts of the body. The cavity of the heart is the seat of the vital powers and the self and plays a central role in the explanations of the three states of awareness—waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep—as well as of death. In sleep, the cognitive powers distributed throughout the body during the waking hours are gathered together in the cavity of the heart. The space of this cavity is homologized with cosmic space (see CU 3.12.7–9), and in the dream state the person travels about this space seeing and enjoying the same type of things that he experienced while awake. During deep and dreamless sleep, the self slips out of that cardiac space and enters the veins going from the heart to the pericardium; there it remains oblivious to everything (see BU 2.1; 4.3–4). At death the self, together with the vital powers, departs from the heart along a channel and exits through either the crown of the head (TU 1.6) or the eye (BU 4.4.2).

Many commentators identify later references to a 'cave' with this space within the heart (Olivelle's translation often amplifies the phrase 'hidden in the cave' as 'hidden in the cave *of the heart*'). Perhaps, however, the allusion to a cave is not to be taken quite so literally, but rather simply as a metaphor for the idea that the self is hidden.[7] The noun *guhā* 'cave', deriving from a verbal root *guh–*, whose meaning is 'to cover, hide, conceal, keep secret', carries the senses of 'a cave, cavern, hiding place; hiding, concealing', just as the participial form *guhya* denotes 'to be concealed, covered or kept secret; mysterious; a secret, mystery'.[8] That is the sense it has when the same

[7] Compare Democritus' famous statement: 'Of truth we know nothing, for truth is in a well' (fr. 117; Diog. L. ix, 72). Democritus (fl. 430 BCE) is reported to have travelled widely, and Diogenes Laertius informs us that 'Some say that he associated with the "naked philosophers" in India' (Diog. L. ix, 35).

[8] Apte, sv. *guh-*, *guhya*. J. L. Mehta, 'The Ṛgveda: text and interpretation', in his *Philosophy and Religion: Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi: Indian Council for Philosophical Research, 1990), p. 283: 'Another myth with a metaphor at its core is that of the demon Vala, the encloser, the cavity that shuts in. Here again we have a common noun turned into a proper name, what appears to us today the mythologization of an abstract idea, in this case, that of enclosing or encaving.'

image surfaces in the *Mahābhārata* as part of a description of the elusiveness of *dharma*, where an identification with the space within the heart would clearly be out of place:

The scriptures are many and divided; the *dharmaśāstras* are many and different. Nobody is called a sage until and unless he holds a different view [from anyone else]. The truth of *dharma* lies concealed in the dark cave.

(MB 1.191.25)

In this it resonates with those other metaphors of concealment that set the tone of the Upaniṣadic text:

The face of truth is covered
with a golden dish.
Open it, O Pūṣan, for me,
a man faithful to the truth.
Open it, O Pūṣan, for me to see.

(BU 5.15.1; IU 15)

Hidden in all the beings,
this self is not visibly displayed.
Yet, people of keen vision see him,
with eminent and sharp minds.

(KaU. 3.12)

That the soul is concealed—this is the force of the phrase 'hidden in the cave' as it occurs in the Kaṭha, Taittirīya and Muṇḍaka. The self within is not transparent; it stands in need of discovery. Discovery by whom? By oneself, presumably. But what can hide the self from itself? And how, if concealed, is it to be disclosed? The Upaniṣadic author buries the self in order to make possible a project of self-discovery, but must not bury the self *too* deeply or the viability of that very project will be undermined.[9]

[9] As Śaṅkara was well aware, a paradox threatens: for inquiry into the self to be possible, the self must be neither already known nor altogether unknown. *The Brahmasūtra Śāṅkara Bhāṣya*, ed. with commentaries N. A. K. Shastri and V. L. Shastri Pansikar (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1917), pp. 78–83 (under *Brahmasūtra* 1.1.1). On this version of the paradox of inquiry and its later elaborations, see Amber Carpenter and Jonardon Ganeri, 'Meno goes to India: The new paradox of inquiry' (forthcoming).

1.3 What conceals the self?

To a modern mind the problem of the self's concealment may seem obscure. Am I not condemned forever to be in my own company? The more immediate problem seems to be not how to find the self but how to escape it, in the all-too-brief moments when one 'loses oneself' in a reverie or film or good novel.

One straightforward idea is that the self is just so small that it is very hard to spot. In the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, the self is compared with a grain of rice or barley (BU 5.6.1). In the Chāndogya, it is 'smaller than a grain of rice or barley, smaller than a mustard seed, smaller even than a millet grain or a millet kernel' (CU 3.14.3); but it is also the width of a span (CU 5.18.1). In the Kaṭha, again, the self is the size of a thumb (KaU 2.12, 6.17).

Then again we are told several times that the self pervades and saturates the body that hides it:

> This very breath, which is the self consisting of intelligence, penetrates this bodily self up to the very hairs of the body, up to the very nails. Just as a razor within a case or a termite within a termite hill, so this self consisting of intelligence penetrates this bodily self up to the very hairs of the body, up to the very nails.
>
> (KsU 4.20)

> Like oil in sesame seeds and butter in curds, like water in the riverbed and fire in the fire-drills, so, when one seeks it with truth and austerity, one grasps that self (*ātman*) in the body (*ātman*)—that all-pervading self, which is contained [in the body] like butter in milk.
>
> (SU 2.15–16)

That is the theme too in a very famous passage which speaks of the self as having five 'sheaths':

> Different from and lying within this man formed from the essence of food is the self consisting of lifebreath, which suffuses that man completely … Different from and lying within this self consisting of breath is the self consisting of mind, which suffuses this other self completely … Different from and lying within this self consisting of mind is the self consisting of perception, which suffuses this other self completely … Different from and lying within this self consisting of perception is the self consisting of bliss, which suffuses this other self completely.
>
> (TU 2.3.2–5)

The view that the soul has the same extension as the body has been maintained by the Jainas, one proprioceptive argument being that the soul must always be in contact with the senses and the senses are located on the body's surface.[10] Even if we are reluctant to take literally the notion that the soul has spatial boundaries, the argument points in the direction of a second way to make sense of the idea that the self is hidden by the body, namely that it does not enter the 'field' of perception of any of the sense faculties. For, as the Kaṭha says:

> The Self-existent One pierced the apertures outward,
> therefore, one looks out, and not into oneself.
> A certain wise man in search of immortality,
> turned his sight inward and saw the self within.
> (KaU 4.1)

The self, then, is *mis*-placed; and it is not only because the self is on the 'wrong side' of the senses that it cannot be sensed but also because it lacks the sensible qualities:

> It has no sound or touch,
> no appearance, taste, or smell.
> (KaU 3.15ab)

> Not by speech, not by the mind,
> not by sight can he be grasped.
> How else can that be perceived,
> other than by saying 'He is!'
> (KaU. 6.12)

If the self fails to be an object for the senses, however, how is it to become an object of desire, for desire seems to track the sensory (on seeing something, one wishes either to obtain or avoid it)? This question leads us to an important passage at the beginning of Chāndogya chapter 8, a preparatory passage for the story of Indra and Virocana to come (see above).

[10] In the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* we find an argument that the soul is conscious only of that with which the body is in contact (VS 3.2.1, 5.2.15–16). VS 7.1.28–29, however, state that the soul is 'large' (*mahat*), which the commentators take to imply omnipresence (*parama-mahattva*). For discussion: Keiichi Miyamoto, *The Metaphysics and Epistemology of the Early Vaiśeṣikas* (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1996), chapter 2.

Here the discovery of the self is related to the discovery of true (*satya*) desires masked by false (*anṛta*) ones. The passage begins in a by now familiar way:

Now, here in this fort of *brahman* there is a small lotus, a dwelling place, and within it, a small place. In that space there is something—and that's what you should try to discover, that's what you should seek to perceive.

(CU 8.1.1)

What is the something? It is the self:

That is the self free from evils—free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desires and intentions become true . . . . So, those here in this world who depart without having discovered the self and these true desires do not obtain complete freedom of movement in any of the worlds, whereas those here in this world who depart after discovering the self and these true desires obtain complete freedom of movement in all the worlds.

(CU 8.1.5–6)

The true desires—and with them the true self—are, however, hidden by other, false desires:

Now, these true desires are masked by the false. Although they are true, they have the false for a mask, for when someone close to him departs from this world, he doesn't get to see him here. On the other hand, people who are close to him, whether they are alive or dead, as well as anything else that he desires but does not get—all that he finds by going there, for these true desires of his masked by the false are located there.

Take, for example, a hidden treasure of gold. People who do not know the terrain, even when they pass right over it time and again, would not discover it. In exactly the same way, all these creatures, even though they go there every day, do not discover this world of *brahman*, for they are led astray by the false.

(CU 8.3.1–2)

The self, we are now told, is just too close to be seen. Or rather, being present *whenever* we see, we do not see *it*. Are the false desires the 'outward desires', mentioned in Katha 4.2, pursued by fools who seek the stable in the unstable? The senses, those outward apertures, are forever drawing us away from what is indeed close at hand. As for the true desire, is it a desire for that which is stable (and indeed immortal), a desire not for the thing seen but for the reason there is seeing, for the principle behind sight, a

desire not for the thinking but for the reason there is thought? If so, then no wonder that without knowing the terrain, we pass over it time and time again.

This idea receives support from a passage in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, where Yājñavalkya also distinguishes two sorts of desire, and with them two kinds of self. When a person acts in accordance with his ordinary desires he is made good by good action and made bad by bad action:

> What a man turns out to be depends on how he acts and on how he conducts himself. If his actions are good, he will turn into something good. If his actions are bad, he will turn into something bad. A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action. And so people say: 'A person here consists simply of desire.' A man resolves in accordance with his desire, acts in accordance with his resolve, and turns out to be in accordance with his action.
>
> (BU 4.4.5)

This passage echoes Yājñavalka's furtive advice to Āryabhāga in BU 3.3.2, where he likewise taught that a man is made by what he does—the earliest statement of the doctrine of *karma* (see also Appendix B). But Yājñavalkya goes on now to speak of another sort of man, a man whose only desire is the self:

> Now, a man who does not desire—who is without desires, who is freed from desires, whose desires are fulfilled, whose only desire is the self (*ātmakāma*)—his vital functions do not depart. *Brahman* he is, and to *brahman* he goes. On this point there is the following verse:
>
> When they are all banished,
> those desires lurking in one's heart;
> Then a mortal becomes immortal,
> and attains *brahman* in this world.
>
> (BU 4.4.6)

The true desire of such a person is not a desire for anything sensible, but a desire for the self, a desire for the principle by which there is sensing. This is the self of which the Kauṣītaki says (KsU 3.8), 'it does not become more by good actions or in any way less by bad actions'. This is the true self hidden in the cave, the cave of the body and its embodied desires.

Action unmotivated by desire is a transparent expression of the self. Desire conceals the self. These Upaniṣadic ideas about concealment by

desire find their fullest statement in the *Bhagavadgītā*, where action without desire is held to constitute the soul, while actions produced in response to desire destroy it:

In action alone is your proper interest, never in [its] fruits. Let not your motive be the fruit of action, nor your attachment to inaction.

(BG 2.47)

As fire is enveloped in smoke, and a mirror [obscured] by dust, as an embryo is concealed by the womb, so is this [self] covered by that [desire]. Knowledge is concealed by this perpetual enemy of the knower, this insatiable fire in the form of desire, o son-of-Kuntī.

(BG 3.38–9)

1.4 The self is not an object of consciousness

The metaphor of the self as hidden in the cave, I will now argue, is best interpreted as giving voice to the doctrine that the self is not a possible object of consciousness. Our search for the self among the objects of consciousness is a forlorn one, and indeed is ill-conceived. If the self is not within the purview of the senses and mind, that is not because it has nothing to do with sensing and thinking; in fact, just the opposite—being what makes sensing and thinking possible, it is 'too close' to be seen. Not being an object among others in the world of comprehended objects, why shouldn't it best be described through the use of paradoxical conceptions?[11]

That the self the Upaniṣadic sages were in search of is not itself an object of consciousness follows from Yājñavalkya's clever explanation of the matter to his wife, Maitreyī. The account occurs twice in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka: at 2.4.14, and again at 4.5.15, where a short but important elucidatory passage is inserted into the text. Here is 2.4.14:

When there is a duality of some kind, then the one can smell the other, the one can see the other, the one can hear the other, the one can greet the other, the one can think of the other, and the one can perceive the other. When, however, the

[11] For example, CU 3.14.3. On the Upaniṣadic use of paradox: Joel Brereton, 'The Upaniṣads', in W. T. de Bary and I. Bloom (eds), *Approaches to the Asian Classics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 115–35.

Whole has become one's very self (*ātman*), then who is there for one to smell and by what means? Who is there for one to see and by what means? Who is there for one to hear and by what means? Who is there for one to greet and by what means? Who is there for one to think and by what means? Who is there for one to perceive and by what means? By what means can one perceive him by means of whom one perceives this whole world? Look—by what means can one perceive the perceiver?

(BU 2.4.14)

The text of 4.5.15 inserts between the last and the penultimate sentences:

About this self (*ātman*), one can only say 'not—, not—. ' He is ungraspable, for he cannot be grasped. He is undecaying, for he is not subject to decay. He has nothing sticking to him, for he does not stick to anything. He is not bound; yet he neither trembles in fear nor suffers injury.

The insertion tells us what it is that the argument is meant to show—that the self is not an object of thought, nor even of reference, or as Yājñavalkya even more bluntly explains to Uṣasta Cākrāyaṇa:

You can't see the seer who does the seeing; you can't hear the hearer who does the hearing; you can't think of the thinker who does the thinking; and you can't perceive the perceiver who does the perceiving. The self within all is this self of yours.

(BU 3.5.2)

Yājñavalkya's clever argument explains the transition from 'the perceiver does not perceive himself' to 'the perceiver is not perceived'. It is taken for granted that perceiving is an anti-reflexive relation, but it does not yet follow that the perceiver is not and cannot be perceived, that the relation is anti-symmetric (i.e. that if one is a perceiver, then one is not a thing perceived). The possibility to be excluded is that A perceives B and B perceives A, or some wider circle of perception. Yājñavalkya argues by universalization of the relata, supposing first that the perceiver is the All and then that the perceived is the whole world. A perceiver who is All, clearly, leaves nothing to perceive and is therefore not itself perceived by something other than itself; similarly, if the All is perceived, and perceiving is anti-reflexive, then the perceiver cannot be among the world of things perceived.

The Upaniṣadic self is not, then, an object of consciousness. To say that it is instead the subject of consciousness will not advance the discussion very far, for this has been granted all along; what we have now done is to reject the idea that the subject of consciousness can be thought of as an

object of consciousness. Indeed, we are now better able to make sense of Prajāpati's graded instruction to Indra. Of the three bogus accounts of the self he offered, the first two are attempts to represent the self as a possible *object* of consciousness. Perhaps it is an object of sensory awareness, the reflected image in a pool of water? Indra is not fooled. Perhaps, then, if not a sensory object, it is an object of dream consciousness, 'the one who goes happily about in a dream' (CU 8.10.1)? Indra takes his time, but sees through the ruse. So let us give up on the idea of the self as an object of consciousness, and say instead that it is the residue that is there in dreamless, contentless sleep—but this 'self', Indra clearly saw, is not a self at all: 'this self as just explained, you see, does not perceive itself fully as, "I am this"; it does not even know any of these beings here. It has become completely annihilated' (CU 8.11.1).

Finally, Prajāpati provides an account of that self by discovering which one obtains all the worlds and all one's desires are fulfilled:

Now, when this sight here gazes into space, that is the seeing person, the faculty of sight enables one to see. The one who is aware: 'Let me smell this'—that is the self; the faculty of smell enables him to smell. The one who is aware: 'Let me say this'—that is the self; the faculty of speech enables him to speak. The one who is aware: 'Let me listen to this'—that is the self; the faculty of hearing enables him to hear. The one who is aware: 'Let me think about this'—that is the self; the mind is his divine faculty of sight. This very self rejoices as it perceives with his mind, with that divine sight, those objects of desire found in the world of brahman. It is this self that the gods venerate, as a result of which they have obtained all the worlds, and have had all their desires fulfilled. Likewise, when someone discovers this self and comes to perceive it, he will obtain all the worlds and have all his desires fulfilled.

(CU 8.12.4–6)[12]

[12] I hear a similar explanation in Proclus, in his commentary on Euclid's *Elements*: 'And indeed prior to both of these [cognitions and desires], there is something unitary in the soul, which often says "I am perceiving", "I am reasoning", "I have appetite", and "I will". It is conscious of all these activities and cooperates with them.' Trans. Richard Sorabji, in *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD* (London: Duckworth, 2004), vol. 1, p. 151. Again, Roderick Chisholm: 'There are many references in literature to a discovery... which seems to be of the first importance but which can be put only in some such sentence as "I am me". What is discovered in such cases?... It is the discovery one makes when one is first aware of the unity of consciousness; it is thus a discovery about those things one has been directly attributing to oneself. One suddenly becomes aware of the fact that they are all being attributed to the *same* thing.... And *how* does one come to see this? It would be correct to say: "One has only to consider it to see that it is true." But it is, apparently, something that many people never happen to consider.' Roderick M. Chisholm, *The First Person: An Essay on Reference and Intentionality* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981), p. 90.

The conception of self described here is distinct from and an improvement over two others: the conception of self as agent, and the conception of self as controller. The agentive self is the one who sees, the one who thinks, the one:

> By whom impelled, by whom compelled,
> does the mind soar forth?
> By whom enjoined does the breath,
> march on as the first?
> By whom is this speech impelled,
> with which people speak?
> And who is the god that joins
> the sight and hearing?
>
> (KaU 1.1)

The controller self is the self who rides the body-chariot:

> Know the self as a rider in a chariot,
> and the body, as simply the chariot.
> Know the intellect as the charioteer,
> and the mind, as simply the reins.
>
> (KaU 3.3)

> The senses, they say, are the horses,
> and sense objects are the paths around them;
> He who is linked to the body, senses, and mind,
> the wise proclaim as the one who enjoys.
>
> (KaU. 3.4)

The self described by Prajāpati is no mere agent, no mere controller. It is the one who stands still, observing itself as it watches, as it hears and thinks. It is not merely the one who sees, nor the one who decides to look, but the one who is aware: 'let me see'. It is not a detached or impassive self, disengaged from its own desires and actions, but it is aware of itself even as it pursues them—it is that in virtue of which the subject of consciousness is self-conscious, something that is, necessarily, not itself an object of consciousness.[13]

[13] The idea can be traced through Schopenhauer to Wittgenstein, and from him to more recent writers, such as Sidney Shoemaker. See Appendix A.

1.5 The hidden connection between one self and all

There is a hidden truth about this hidden self, the self that looks out from the body's nine portals but is not itself a possible object of gaze. The *Upaniṣad*—the 'hidden connection' or 'secret teaching'[14]—is that the self that gazes out from within my body is the same as the self that gazes out from within yours. The principle (*brahman*) behind thinking is the same for each and every thinking self (*ātman*). Indeed it is this principle that the self truly consists in, this 'by knowing which a man comes to know this whole world' (MuU 1.3), the 'highest object of the teachings on hidden connections, an object rooted in austerity and the knowledge of the self' (SU 1.16). This is what Yama, the lord of death, taught Naciketas:

> As the single wind, entering living beings,
> adapts its appearance to match that of each;
> So the single self within each being,
> adapts its appearance to match that of each,
> yet remains quite distinct.
>
> As the sun, the eye of the whole world,
> is not stained by visual faults external to it;
> So the single self within every being,
> is not stained by the suffering of the world,
> being quite distinct from it.
>
> (KaU 5.10–1)

The concealed Upaniṣadic self is an impersonal self, the same for all. Knowing this, how could the various happenings that befall one as one threads a path through life matter so much? How could they be invested with personal significance to one who knows that one is not more *this* person than *that*? With a robust sense of self, one has to be content with one's own pleasures and pains; with only an impersonal sense of self, the pleasures (and also pains) of everyone are one's own: 'You who know this self here, the one common to all men, as somehow *distinct*—you eat food. But when someone venerates this self here, the one common to all men, as measuring the size of a span and as *beyond all measure*, he eats food within all the worlds, all the beings, and all the selves' (CU 5.18.1).

[14] For analyses of the etymology, see the bibliography cited by Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, p. 24, n. 29.

That the true self is the same within each of us follows from the rule of substitution (*ādeśa*) which the sage Āruṇi taught to his son Śvetaketu (CU 6.1.1–7). In grammar and ritual, a rule of substitution tells us when one word or object can stand in for another, it being generally understood that the substitute resembles and behaves like the original.[15] Olivelle comments that 'such rules within the Upaniṣadic tradition are said to be "secret", thus approximating the meaning of *Upaniṣad*' (p. 501). Here is what Āruṇi told his recently educated and overly proud son:

> 'Śvetaketu, here you are my son, swell-headed, thinking yourself to be learned, and arrogant; so you must have surely asked about that rule of substitution (*ādeśa*) by which one hears what has not been heard before, thinks of what has not been thought of before, and perceives what has not been perceived before?' 'How indeed does that rule of substitution work, sir?' 'It is like this, son. By means of just one lump of clay one would perceive everything made of clay—the transformation (*vikāra*) is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: "It's clay." It is like this, son. By means of just one copper trinket one would perceive everything made of copper—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: "It's copper." It is like this, son. By means of just one nail-cutter one would perceive everything made of iron—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: "It's iron." That son, is how this rule of substitution works.'
>
> (CU 6.1.3–6)

Thereupon Āruṇi teaches Śvetaketu how to look for the hidden core of things, the sap pervading the tree, the seed in a banyan fruit, the salt in salt-water, and repeatedly he says, 'The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self. And that['s how] you are (*tat tvam asi*), Śvetaketu' (CU 6.8.7).[16] Knowing the 'archetype' or

[15] Eivind Kahrs, *Indian Semantic Analysis: The 'nirvacana' Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), chapter 5. See also my 'The ritual roots of moral reason,' in Kevin Schilbrack (ed.), *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 207–33.

[16] Olivelle's translation of the famous equation *tat tvam asi* is controversial; it is more normally rendered 'You are that', the neuter pronoun *tat* construed anaphorically to back-refer to *brahman*. Olivelle argues, following Brereton, that the rules of Vedic syntax do not permit a neuter pronoun to stand in opposition to a masculine noun (*tvam*, 'you'). He therefore renders *tat* adverbially. Joel Brereton, '*Tat tvam asi* in context', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136 (1986): 98–109; Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, pp. 560–1. At least one critic has objected, however, that in interpreting texts, principles of philosophical charity sometimes override syntax; see Stephen H. Phillips, 'Engagement with Sanskrit philosophical texts', in Rita Sherma and Arvind Sharma (eds), *Hinduism and Hermeneutics: Towards a Pluralistic Discourse in the Study of Religion* (New York: Oxford

'model', and the rule that tells us how to derive the new using the old as a pattern,[17] puts us in a position to gain knowledge of the new. Here the term 'minute essence' (*aṇiman*) is used in the 'vanilla essence' sense, implying an extract fine and minute. Elsewhere, the metaphor of the salt in salt-water carries more the idea of 'self' as a mass term, referring to a single but distributed spread of cognition:

> When a chunk of salt is thrown in water, it dissolves into that very water, and it cannot be picked up in any way. Yet, from whichever place one may take a sip, the salt is there! In the same way this Immense Being has no limit or boundary and is a compact mass (*ghana*) of perception (*vijñāna*).
>
> (BU 2.4.12)

This passage, which immediately precedes Yājñavalkya's clever explanation of why the perceiver cannot be perceived, hints at a further reason why the self is not a possible object of consciousness—lacking a proper boundary (limit, surface), it cannot be pinned down. All we succeed in doing, when we look for the self within, is to sample cognitions, much as we sample the salt-water or the chunk of salt. Knowing this to be the 'essence' of the self, and knowing the rule by which one self is substituted for another (what has to change, what remains constant), we derive knowledge of all.

Knowing oneself is a matter of knowing the quintessence of thinking, and this is common to all. Given indeed that the self is not an object, what other story could one tell? For it follows that no criterion for the individuation of objects could be used to individuate distinct selves. The 'thin' self we discover in the phenomenology of thinking itself is not the 'thick' self supported by differences between individuals with respect to the contents of their thoughts (see further the end of chapter 7). Indeed, and ironically, it is nevertheless a self behind which one can hide. Italo Calvino has made the point well: 'Just as the author, since he has no intention of telling about himself, decided to call the character "I" as if to

University Press, 2007). Valerie Roebuck is similarly sceptical: '[T]here are numerous places in the Upaniṣads where the authors have departed from the strict rules of grammatical gender to make a teaching point.' Valerie J. Roebuck, *The Upaniṣads* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 423, n. 12. She translates CU 6.8.7 as, 'This subtle part is what all this has as self. It is truth: it is the self. *You* are that, Śvetaketu.' There is room to argue that in fact no departure from grammar is involved, that nominal sentences do not always demand agreement in gender.

[17] Compare the use in ritual theory of the notion of *tantra*; cf. my 'The ritual roots of moral reason' (ibid.).

conceal him, not having to name him or describe him more than this stark pronoun'.[18] The Upaniṣadic self is a mask behind which individuals can hide their individuality, even as that individuality masks the self.

1.6 Finding the self in the periphery of thinking

If the self had simply been lost, we might have hoped to find it again. As matters stand, we are in worse shape: it is not that we have simply mislaid the self, but that the self is hidden, in principle, from view. Our search for the self as one object among others in the world is forlorn. So in what can self-discovery consist, given what we now know, that it does not consist in the discovery of a self 'out there'? For the Upaniṣadic sage, self-discovery is the supreme quest and the source of moral and spiritual fulfilment; but they have hidden the self so well as to make their own quest seem hopeless. To the question 'in what does the disclosure of the self consist?' there seem now to be two possible answers. One is to identify a non-objectual mode or aspect of experience, the enjoyment of which is constitutive of self-knowledge. This is the way of the mystic, but need not necessarily lead to mysticism. The other way is the way of the quietist, who will seek to explore the moral and experiential consequences of the discovery that the self is not a possible object of consciousness, without trying to find a substitute for the knowledge that cannot be had (an epistemic humility). Yājñavalkya, again in his conversation with Maitreyī, makes what appears to be a constructive proposal of the first sort:

> It is like this. When a drum is being beaten, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the drum or the man beating that drum. Or when a conch is being blown, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the conch or the man blowing that conch. Or when a lute is being played, you cannot catch the external sounds; you catch them only by getting hold of the lute or the man playing that lute.
>
> (BU 2.4.7–9; 4.5.8–10)

The context has made it amply clear that, when it comes to the human subject, what cannot be caught is the self. So the proposal is that, when a

[18] Italo Calvino, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 15.

sensation is being sensed, you catch the sensing self only by getting hold of the sensing; when a cognition is being cognized, you catch the thinker only by getting hold of the thinking. Here is a way to reach the self—not by grasping it as an object, but catching it in its activity of sensing and thinking. Just as it is hopeless to catch a sound in the air, so it is impossible to catch the self as if it were a thing. If we cannot catch the sound once it has been released, we can catch it at the moment of its production—catch the producing of the sound. If we cannot catch the self as an object among others in the world, we can catch it in the very act of thinking. This tallies nicely with the Chāndogya description mentioned before (CU 8.12.4–5). My proposal, in other words, is that we read the passage as saying that the self is caught in the phenomenological quality of thinking, in the flavour of the experience of 'what it is like' to think. There is something that it feels like, from within, to be thinking, and in focusing upon this one is participating in a non-objectual awareness of the self. This is something that cannot directly be 'taught', and it is the reason for the oblique literary form assumed by the Upaniṣadic narrative. The very narrative form that the story of Indra assumes, as an allegory of concealment, functions protreptically, to turn the mind of the reader, to redirect their search in a new direction. I will say more about this in chapter 4.

Consider the following passage, again from the second report of Yājñavalkya's conversation with Maitreyī:

> As a mass of salt has no distinctive core and surface; the whole thing is a single mass of flavour—so indeed, my dear, this self has no distinctive core and surface; the whole thing is a compact mass (*ghana*) of cognition (*prajñāna*).
>
> (BU 4.5.13)

In this passage, which parallels BU 2.4.12 quoted above, the use of the metaphor of salt is given a new meaning. The search for the self is not a search for the cognitive *core* of the psyche, but for the *quintessence* that pervades it and can be extracted (*pra-jñāna*). The description of the self as being without a distinctive core and surface tells strongly against the correctness of attributing to the Upaniṣadic thinkers a 'substratum' theory of self.

How exactly *does* it feel to experience the self?

> It is like this [says Yājñavalkya, this time to Janaka]. As a man embraced by a woman he loves is oblivious to everything within or without, so this person

embraced by the self consisting of knowledge is oblivious to everything within or without. Clearly, this is the aspect of his where all desires are fulfilled, where the self is the only desire, and which is free from desires and far from sorrows.

(BU 4.3.21)

Where a man sees, hears, or discerns no other thing—that is plenitude. Where one sees, hears, or discerns some other thing—that is scarcity.... Plenitude, indeed, is below; plenitude is above; plenitude is in the west; plenitude is in the east; plenitude is in the south; and plenitude is in the north. Indeed, plenitude extends over this whole world. Now the substitution of the word 'I'—I am, indeed, below; I am above; I am in the west; I am in the east; I am in the south; I am in the north. Indeed, I extend over this whole world. Next, the substitution of self—The self, indeed, is below; the self is above; the self is in the west; the self is in the east; the self is in the south; and the self is in the north. Indeed, the self extends over this whole world. A man who sees it this way, thinks about it this way, and perceives it this way; a man who finds pleasure in the self, who dallies with the self, who mates with the self, and who attains bliss in the self—he becomes completely his own master; he obtains complete freedom of movement in all the worlds.

(CU 7.5.1–2)

What I am calling an awareness of the 'what it feels like to be thinking' is, the first of these passages says, a non-objectual experience of pure rapture. In the second passage, it is described as an experience that does not represent the subject as having a spatial location. Contrast that with ordinary perceptual experience, whose egocentric frame-of-reference places me in the centre of a network of spatial relationships with the objects perceived. The Upaniṣadic self isn't a self shown but not stated, as it was for Wittgenstein; rather, it is the self that hovers in experience's phenomenal shadow. It is a sense of being present everywhere; or better, a sense of being stripped of a sense of being somewhere.

Even though it is present to each of us, the phenomenal character of thinking itself is barely noticeable, hidden as it is behind the 'false desires' of worldly cognitive involvement. In the cultivated sensibility of the Upaniṣadic sage, however, it is strong and loud, completely satisfying:

Just as a disk smeared with clay, once it is cleaned well, shines brightly, so also an embodied person, once he has perceived the true nature of the self, becomes solitary, his goal attained and free from sorrow.

(SU 2.14)

The self is discovered, then, in the shadowy edges of experience. It is a further step, and one taken only in the more theistic late Upaniṣads, to identify this experience with a mystical awareness of the divine. This is the true nature of self, distinct from the bits and pieces of cognition, which are mere *designations* of the 'knowledge' (*prajñāna*) in which the self consists:

> Which of these is the self? Is it that by which one sees? Or hears? Or smells odours? Or utters speech? Or distinguishes between what is tasty and what is not? Is it the heart and the mind? Is it awareness? Perception? Discernment? Cognition? Wisdom? Insight? Steadfastness? Thought? Reflection? Drive? Memory? Intention? Purpose? Will? Love? But these are various designations of cognition (*prajñānasya nāmadheyāni*) .... Knowledge (*prajñāna*) is the eye of all that, and on knowledge it is founded. Knowledge is the eye of the world, and knowledge, the foundation. *Brahman* is knowing. It is with this self consisting in knowledge that he went up from this world and, having obtained all his desire in the heavenly world up there, became immortal.
>
> (AU 3.1–4)

I will conclude with a final and necessarily tentative conjecture. The discovery of self has a phenomenology, and that phenomenology is the esoteric phenomenology of disclosure itself. The anxiety has been instilled by a constant reiteration of the message that something of great value has been lost, something that makes the difference between immortal freedom and generations in hell. The sheer relief to be had on being told that what was lost is now found, is itself an ecstatic rapture. What is the catalyst for that ecstatic release? Perhaps not even an actual discovery. In her study in the ethics of secrets, Sissela Bok says:

> [a]wareness of the allure and the dangers of secrecy ... is central to human experience of what is hidden and set apart. Rooted in encounters with the powerful, the sacred, and the forbidden, this experience goes far deeper than the partaking of any one secret. Efforts to guard secrets, probe them, or share them often aim for this deeper and more pervasive experience. If we do not take this into account ... then we shall but skim the surface; and the secrets, once revealed, will seem paltry and out of proportion to all that went into guarding them.[19]

Exactly so here. No actual secret knowledge about the self, no matter how insightful, could by itself explain the enormous reluctance of the Upaniṣadic

[19] Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On the Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), p. 5.

sage to speak. That reluctance has another function—to generate a fearsome sense of secrecy, the release from which constitutes an experience of euphoric bliss, and so directs the mind to where it should, all along, have been looking.[20]

[20] A modern example of this literary use of the trope of secrecy and concealment is found in Henry James's story, 'The figure in the carpet'. James describes the secret as the 'bait on a hook' and as the 'cheese in a mousetrap', enthralling yet frustrating the reader, who is thereby forced to reflect on the nature of their quest. Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1986).

2

Dangerous Truths: The Buddha on Silence, Secrecy and Snakes

> The veil of the parable does not merely serve as a screen; it stirs our desire to seek the hidden mystery within.
>
> Clement of Alexandria

The figure of the Buddha in the Nikāya (the early Buddhist canon, composed gradually in the centuries following the Buddha's death at around 365 BCE), just as that of the Sage in the Upaniṣadic texts, has a philosophical as well as a literary significance. The Buddha too comes across as reluctant to speak the truth about the self; indeed, he is portrayed as wondering at first whether to try to teach it at all.[1] In a telling moment, he is made to liken his ideas to a snake, hard to grasp safely, dangerous if seized the wrong way. More often, he is given to speak in similes and parables, these being a preferred vehicle for communicating the truth when direct assertion is bound to fail. In later chapters of this book I will consider how subsequent Buddhist philosophers sought to recover the true ideas of the Buddha from his parabolic expression of them, through a procedure of hermeneutical extraction, and I will also consider what those ideas are, especially as they relate to the true nature of self. For now, however, I will confine myself to the following question: what does the persona the Buddha is given in the Nikāya texts tell us about the philosophical

[1] At the moment of his enlightenment, he is said to have become reluctant to teach, thinking 'The Dharma that I have found is profound, hard to see, hard to understand; it is peaceful, sublime, beyond the sphere of mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. But this generation takes delight in attachment ... and as such it is hard for them to see this truth.' See Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 24. The story of the Buddha's hesitation, as well as his didactic use of parables, was propagated, through many centuries and several continents, to the founding fathers of the Enlightenment: see Appendix C.

ambitions of their authors? The answer is sufficiently clear: the ambition is to effect a transformation in the minds of their audience. The authors of these texts are clever enough, indeed, even to *tell us* that this is the ambition of the texts: like a self-extracting file, the Nikāya contain within themselves instructions for their proper use.[2] I will examine the way that a text can carry within itself hints about the way it is meant to be read, about the way the truth (as stated in the Buddha's words) is meant to be broached.

2.1 In defence of pleasure

The Buddha loved to teach in parables and similes, and the *Sutta on the Simile of the Snake*[3] contains two of his finest: the simile of the snake and the simile of the raft. As images, they are beautiful and persuasive, and they are intended to 'put on display' a highly significant truth. Figuring out what this truth is, however, is an exercise fraught with difficulties. Perhaps that was itself a part of the intention in the use of similes as a vehicle of instruction into the truth—the listener is forced to figure out their meaning for themselves, and in doing so to make the simile applicable in his or her own particular circumstance. So how are *we* to make sense of and apply the lesson of the snake and the raft?

If the simile is a propaedeutic device, then there must be someone in need of instruction. In our story, the role is given to Ariṭṭha (as it was to Indra, before). Ariṭṭha is a member of the Buddhist community, and he is in no way either malicious or stupid. All the same, he goes around saying that pleasure is *not* an obstacle along the path to liberation, though the Buddha had said that it is:

Exactly so, friends. As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, those things [*sc.* pleasures] called obstructions by the Blessed One, are not able to obstruct one who engages in them.

[2] One might recall in this connection Donald Davidson's observation that 'a speaker may provide us with information relevant to interpreting an utterance *in the course of* making the utterance'. 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs', in his *Truth, Language and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 89–108, at p. 101, my italics.

[3] Majjhima Nikāya i 132–142. *Alagaddūpama Sutta, The Simile of the Snake,* in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom: Boston Books, 1995), pp. 224–36. The final section of this text has to do with the ethics of personhood, and relates to themes we will explore in later chapters of this book. In this chapter I am considering the earlier sections as they provide a context for that later discussion.

For this the horrified members of the community bring him before the Buddha, who promptly teaches him a lesson about the nature of truth and interpretation—the lesson of the raft and the snake. Let us first reflect a little on the crime Ariṭṭha is supposed to have committed. It was not, to be sure, the crime of heresy, for Ariṭṭha did not claim that something the Buddha said was false. He did not say, 'The Blessed One taught that certain things are obstructions to one who engages in them, and in this He was wrong.' His point is rather one of interpretation. The Buddha had said that pleasure is an obstacle in one who strives for enlightened living, but to Ariṭṭha this cannot possibly mean that one should take pleasure in nothing at all, or worse, become a pleasure-hater. The *Sutta* does not tell us exactly what Ariṭṭha did have in mind. Perhaps he just wanted there to be room even in a well-led life for taking simple pleasure in seeing a beautiful sunset; perhaps his idea was that there can be nothing harmful in such positive feelings as go with thinking the right thoughts and doing the right deeds. Either way, what Ariṭṭha wants to do is to deny that the Buddha's assertion that pleasure is always an obstruction should be taken at face value. Rather, we are to understand the Buddha, as always, as engaged in a skilful method. What would be the best way to show someone who is stubbornly attached to the hedonistic idea that pleasure is in itself a goal worthy of pursuit that they are mistaken? It is to confront them, bluntly and directly, with the complete negation of what they have assumed *without question* to be the case. They can then no longer continue as if what they believe is a common presupposition, but are now forced to think about and answer for their belief. Someone who does this will come to see that they are in error to suppose that pleasure is in itself a goal worthy of pursuit, but perhaps will also see that there is nothing harmful as such in taking pleasure in things of value that come one's way.

In short, then, what we might hope to learn from Ariṭṭha is that we must understand the 'indirectness' in the Buddha's words—he is skilfully using his assertions in a way calculated to be the most effective method for shaking his audience out of their misconceptions, rather than asserting the whole of a truth which, though nuanced, would fail to hit home. As Kierkegaard said of his own method of 'indirect communication':

No, an illusion can never be removed directly, and basically only indirectly. If it is an illusion that all are Christians, and if something is to be done, it must be done

> indirectly, not by someone who loudly declares himself to be an extraordinary Christian, but by someone who, better informed, even declares himself not to be be a Christian. That is, one who is under an illusion must be approached from behind.[4]

The Buddha, in saying that pleasures are obstructions along the path, presented the truth in a guise best adapted to our pleasure-seeking habits. For someone like Ariṭṭha and the other members of his Buddhist community, who are a little further along the path than we are, and who are cured of at least the worst of the habits of hedonism, a more nuanced appreciation of the truth has become a possibility.

Unfortunately for Ariṭṭha, this was not how our text has the Buddha receive him. Having summoned him to an audience and made him repeat what he had been saying to the others, the Buddha says:

> Misguided man, to whom have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma in that way? Misguided man, have I not stated in many ways how obstructive things are obstructions, and how they are able to obstruct one who engages in them? I have stated how sensual pleasures provide little gratification, much suffering, and much despair, and how great is the danger in them ... ' When this was said, the bhikkhu Ariṭṭha sat silent, dismayed, with shoulders drooping and head down, glum, and without response .... Then the Blessed One addressed the bhikkhus thus: 'Bhikkhus, do you understand the Dhamma taught by me as this bhikkhu Ariṭṭha does when he misrepresents us by his wrong grasp and injures himself and stores up much demerit?' 'No, venerable sir ... '

Can we read this as a further example of the Buddha's compassionate indirectness? That is, we might try to understand the Buddha's public humiliation of Ariṭṭha as motivated by the thought that the body of the community is not yet ready for the nuanced truth Ariṭṭha has discovered in the Buddha's words, and indeed that it would be harmful for them to hear it before they are ready. Does Ariṭṭha now assume the role of the scapegoat, sacrificed by the Buddha for the benefit of the community at large? Or is it simply that Ariṭṭha has now been convicted, if not of the crime of heretical refusal, then at least that of misrepresenting the Buddha's true view? It is at this point in the *Sutta*, to clarify his meaning, that the Buddha introduces the

[4] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author, A Report to History, and Related Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 43.

similes of the snake and raft, and it is only by examining them closely that we shall be able to discover the real significance of Ariṭṭha's very public disgrace.

2.2 The simile of the snake

The simile of the snake is remarkable. The Buddha compares the truth of his own teaching to a poisonous snake about to bite. Just as someone who wishes to take hold of the snake must do it in the right way, namely by catching its head with a cleft stick and not grabbing it by the tail, so too there is a right and a wrong way to 'take hold' of the truth. The truth wrongly seized will bite the one who grasps it!

Here, bikkhus, some misguided men learn the Dhamma—discourses, stanzas, expositions, verses, exclamations, sayings, birth stories, marvels, and answers to questions—but having learned the Dhamma, they do not examine the meaning of those teachings with wisdom. Not examining the meaning of those teachings with wisdom, they do not gain a reflective acceptance of them. Instead they learn the Dhamma only for the sake of criticising others and for winning in debates, and they do not experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma. Those teachings, being wrongly grasped by them, conduce to their harm and suffering for a long time. Why is that? Because of the wrong grasp of those teachings. Suppose a man needing a snake, seeking a snake, wandering in search of a snake, saw a large snake and grasped its coils or its tail. It would turn back on him and bite his hand or his arm or one of his limbs, and because of that he would come to death or deadly suffering. Why is that? Because of his wrong grasp of the snake.

With the introduction of the simile of the snake, something extraordinary has happened. Up until this point, it had seemed that Ariṭṭha's 'crime' had been to misunderstand and misrepresent the Dhamma, the true teaching of the Buddha. But the simile of the snake has nothing at all to do with the contrast between someone who understands correctly and someone who misunderstands. It turns instead on a quite different, and much more profound, distinction, a distinction in the attitude one might have towards *the value of truth*. The misguided man has, as it were, a 'professional' interest in the truth—thorough knowledge of the truth helps him to win debates and defeat his dialectical opponents. He has, as we would now say, an *instrumental* conception of the value of truth. The truth is not something regarded as a good in itself; it is valuable only insofar as it is a means

to obtaining other things that are regarded as valuable on independent grounds—for example, public acclaim or winning a debate.

Merely to notice that the misguided man has an instrumental attitude towards the truth is not yet, however, to diagnose his error. Consider, first of all, what we are told about the correct and proper way to value the truth as contrasted with the misguided way. People with the right attitude 'experience the good for the sake of which they learned the Dhamma. Those teachings, being rightly grasped by them, conduce to their welfare and happiness for a long time.' It looks as if this too is an instrumental conception, differing only with respect to the ends for the sake of which truth is sought. We are not told much here about what that 'good' is; what we are told is that having the right attitude towards the value of truth is a necessary ingredient in a life that is happy and rewarding. Nor does it follow that someone whose interest in the truth is derived from their desire for other goods does not still value the truth. A scientist who is after fame and fortune and, above all, adulation from his peers, might nevertheless recognize that it is precisely and only by coming up with theories which are *true* that he will gain these things (its truth is what his peers admire about his work). Likewise, someone who wants to win in debate will do so, if the debate is fairly run and well-adjudicated, only by producing the better arguments and the sounder reasons.

Both parties do indeed value the truth itself and they both seem to do so for the sake of some further end; the contrast is in the *manner* in which they value it. The Buddha offers one further suggestion: he says that the misguided man fails to hit the proper attitude towards the truth because he does not allow himself to assume towards the truth a 'reflective acceptance' (Pāli: *paññā*, Skt: *prajñā* 'wisdom'; conceived of here as a reflective acceptance of the truth). There is a *resistance* and a *closedness* in his attitude towards the truth. He values the truth because it is the best means to win debates, but he does not allow the truth to affect him. Contrast this with someone whose attitude is one of 'wisdom'. Such a person is *receptive* to the truth. He is as open to the truth as the sand dune is to the desert wind. He lets the truth blow through him, to affect not only his beliefs but also his hopes, his ideals, the stories he tells about himself, the concerns he has for himself and others. A simple way to make the point would be to say that while both see the truth as valuable for the sake of what it can give, the misguided man has a fixed idea already of the end to which truth

is the means, while someone who is properly open to the truth knows that the possible ends for which truth is a means are indeterminate and without limit. So while the one limits the impact the truth can have on him, the other allows it to saturate the whole of his mental life.

Receptivity is a virtue of truth. It is closely associated with the virtues of insight and compassion. Insight is not mere knowledge—one more true belief added to the pile. It is a matter of the whole view one has of the world when beliefs have had their full impact. Compassion is not mere duty—to be open to the truth of another, for instance their pain, is the very opposite of thinking simply that one has a duty to help. Empathetic engagement replaces calculation in the moral psychology of one's relationships with others.

What about Ariṭṭha, though? The charge against him now, it seems, is neither that he *mistook* the truth, nor even that he *misrepresented* it, but rather that he *misvalued* the truth. Yet there is no suggestion in the *Sutta* that he was motivated by anything like the desire to win debates or to condemn and criticize the foolishness of others. Nor is there any evidence that he was a hedonist who wanted to twist the Buddha's words to license his own desires. At worst, all he wanted was to give pleasure its proper due in the life of a human being. His error was to think that all that mattered was to declare the full and nuanced truth as he understood it, without regard for the effect of that truth on himself or on the spiritual progress of his companions. In other words, he attached to the truth an unconditional value, a value independent of the well-being of those who come to believe it. Such an austere conception of the value of truth puts the goal of truth and the goal of living well at odds with one another, and this cannot be right. Indeed, it is supposed to be the case, the Buddha reminds us, that rightly grasping the truth is 'conducive to our welfare and happiness for a long time'. In Ariṭṭha, the truth has ceased to be a principle that keeps the mind open and responsive but has become a fetish that makes it closed. Someone who grasps the truth *that* way may very well end up being poisoned by it!

2.3 The simile of the raft

It is this idea, that it is an error to think of the truth as being of unconditional value, that is illustrated magnificently in the second simile, the simile of the raft. The Buddha tells the story of a man who, having built a raft in

order to get across from a dangerous place to a place of safety, then thinks to himself 'This raft has been very helpful to me. Suppose I were to hoist it on my head or load it on my shoulder, and then go wherever I want.' The Dhamma is similar to the raft, says the Buddha: it is for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of holding on to. And he concludes:

> Bhikkhus, when you know the Dhamma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even the teachings, how much more so things contrary to the teachings.

The raft is a thing of value, and it has a value because it helps the man escape danger and cross the river. It ceased to have value, the implication seems to be, when that condition was no longer met: to a man not in danger and in no need of crossing a river, a raft has no value at all. The true teachings of the Buddha have a value too. They help a man to 'cross over', to leave behind the world of craving and attachment and reach the state of enlightened life.[5] When their purpose is finished, the simile seems to imply, the Buddha's teachings are of no further use or value. If attachment in any shape or form is a cause of suffering, then so is attachment even to the truth.

Charming as it is, on closer reflection this seductive analogy is extremely problematic, and this for two reasons. First of all, it appears to recommend that the teachings of the Buddha have at best a merely instrumental value.[6] They are valuable because, and only because, they are the best means we have for crossing over. The problem with this is that the *truth* of these teachings ceases to have any work to do: that the Buddha's teachings are also true, as well as having great utility, simply drops out of the picture. Let us suppose, to dramatize the point, that it really is the most effective means to free ourselves from the pains and sufferings of attachment that we come to believe that none of the objects of our concern is of durable and stable longevity. A firm conviction in the impermanence and instability of all we value, including ourselves as enduring loci of agency and responsibility, might well be the most effective way to rid ourselves

[5] Saṃyutta Nikāya iv 174–5 repeats the simile, and decodes it: '"The near shore"... this is a designation for identity. "The further shore"... this is a designation for nibbāna. "The raft"... this is a designation for the noble eightfold path.' *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1239.

[6] That is how Jayatilleke takes it: 'The parable of the raft... is intended to indicate the utilitarian character of the teachings or the "truth" of Buddhism.' K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), p. 357. He cites Wittgenstein (see below) with approval.

of the disease of craving and hopeless concern. Why then should it matter if these beliefs are in fact quite false? Their utility would in no way be compromised.[7]

It was Nietzsche who first taught *us* not to confuse truth with utility: there can be great utility in lying, especially to ourselves; and equally, the truth can be of great disutility.[8] The general attitude in the Nikāya seems to be that lying is never a component of right conduct in a follower of the path;[9] but this does not deny to the Buddha himself the possibility of a compassionate lie. There is one remarkable passage, in the *Abhayarājakumāra Sutta*, where the statements of the Buddha are classified according to their truth-value, utility and pleasantness to hear. The prince Abhaya has asked the Buddha the following question: 'Venerable sir, would a Tathāgata utter such speech as would be unwelcome or disagreeable to others?' The Buddha, saying that to such a question there is no straightforward answer, asks Abhaya what he would do if he saw a child put a pebble in its mouth. The prince replies that he would remove it, even it meant hurting the child. Then the Buddha says:

So too, prince, such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter.

Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter.

Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable to others: the Tathāgata knows the time to use such speech.

[7] Gisela Striker presses just this complaint against the Hellenistic philosopher Sextus Empiricus; see 'Ataraxia: happiness as tranquillity', in her *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 194. This is one reason why, later on in this book, I will resist too close an assimilation of the Sceptics and the Buddhists.

[8] 'But should both be necessary—a lot of trust *as well as* a lot of untrust ... [The idea that truth is of unconditional value] could never have originated if truth *and* untruth had constantly made it clear that they were both useful, as they are.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), §344. See also Alexander Nehemas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), chapter 2: 'Untruth as a condition for life'.

[9] Majjhima Nikāya iii 48–9 (cf. i 289): 'And what kind of verbal conduct causes unwholesome states to diminish and wholesome states to increase in one who cultivates it? Here someone abandoning false speech, abstains from false speech ... he does not in full awareness speak falsehood for his own ends, or for another's ends, or for some trifling worldly end.' *The Middle Length Discourses*, pp. 915–16.

Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, but which is welcome and agreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter.

Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is welcome and agreeable to others: such speech the Tathāgata does not utter.

Such speech as the Tathāgata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, and which is welcome and agreeable to others: the Tathāgata knows the time to use such speech.

'Why is that?' Because the Tathāgata has compassion for beings.[10]

This is one of those passages in the Nikāya where the reader is provided with guidance as to how to interpret the text. The Buddha states that he will never say something that is not beneficial, but he will say things that are true and beneficial, if the circumstances call for it, whether they are welcome or not. There is, however, one glaring omission: the Buddha is given to say nothing about the case of speech that is untrue but beneficial! There is clearly something awkward about this case. His view cannot have been that, whether beneficial or not, to lie is always morally wrong; for then why would he mention the unbeneficial lie but fail to mention the beneficial one? Jayatilleke speculates that the reason for the omission is simply that, for the Buddha, there are no such cases: the Pāli term 'beneficial' (*attha*), he argues, means something like 'what is morally good in the sense of being useful for the attainment of the goal of nirvāṇa', and '[s]ince falsehood or the assertion of a statement which is false (*musāvāda*) was considered a moral evil, it would have been held to be logically or causally impossible for what is false, i.e. what is morally evil, to result in what was useful in the sense of being morally advantageous or good (*atthasaṃhitam*)'.[11] As an argument, this is clearly question-begging; but it serves to make the point that one explanation of the Buddha's omission is that it is taken for granted that lies can never be 'beneficial'. That is, we have seen, certainly held to be the

[10] Majjhima Nikāya i 395. *The Middle Length Discourses*, p. 500. This passage is enough, as Jayatilleke points out, to show that there is no pragmatist theory of truth in the Nikāya; *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 358. Tom Tillemans reaches the same conclusion with respect to at least one later Buddhist school; *Scripture, Logic, Language: Essays on Dharmakīrti and his Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1999), pp. 6–11.

[11] K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, p. 359; cf. Rupert Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening: A Study of the Bodhi-Pakkiyā* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), p. 108, who remarks, as I do, on the oddity of the argument.

case for the recipients of the Buddha's words: their moral progress is always impeded by a lie, even if that lie should benefit another. It is perfectly possible, however, that the Buddha's singular omission has another cause, that his compassionate ends would be undermined by making public all the means by which those ends are to be brought about. Perhaps the Buddha is silent here because to remain silent is the most skilful thing to do. The Buddha's unconditional truthfulness is then seen to be what Hume called an 'artificial' virtue. Later Buddhist philosophers treated the problem with greater seriousness than does the Nikāya, as I will show in chapter 4 of this book. There, I will also examine another famous metaphor employed by the Buddha: the likening of his teachings to a medicine that expels itself as well as the poison it removes.

The simile of the raft is problematic for a second reason. Let us grant for the sake of argument that what matters for 'crossing over' is the truth of the Buddha's teachings and not simply that they are believed. The new worry concerns the implication of the analogy, that for one who has indeed 'crossed over', the truth ceases altogether to be something of value.[12] The image of the man clinging to the raft long after it has served its purpose is marvellous and beguiling; but let us counter-balance it with another. Suppose instead we think of a man fleeing danger by climbing a tree or a large rock. From the top, he is safe, and not only that, but he also has an excellent view. Should he then say to himself 'This rock has served me well, and now I can dispense with it'? Obviously not. The point is that we might prefer to see a solid grasp of the truth as helping to *sustain* and *maintain* a person in a form of life, for example the life of a sincere Buddhist practitioner, rather than as functioning merely as a means to an end. Hellenistic scholars have made a related point about the function of the therapeutic metaphor: 'The medical analogy should perhaps be read as making philosophical study comparable less to surgery or to drinking medicine than to lifelong healthy activity.'[13]

[12] Some such worry motivates I. B. Horner's 'transcendency thesis' about Buddhist ethics, that 'morality is to be left behind ... like a raft once the crossing over has been safely accomplished. In other words, the *arahat* is above good and evil, and has transcended both.' I. B. Horner, *The Basic Position of Sīla* (Colombo: Bauddha Sahitya Sabha, 1950), p. 1. Damien Keown's critique of Horner's thesis, in *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1992), chapter 4, is well taken.

[13] A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 156. See also §4.1 of this book.

In other words, if the Buddha's words really are *true*, what on earth could make us think they are simply dispensable? It is tempting to think here of Wittgenstein, who famously likened the statements of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with the rungs of a ladder, a ladder that could and should be discarded when one has gained understanding. The comparison is false, however, and for an instructive reason. Wittgenstein thought of the propositions of the *Tractatus* as quite literally nonsense, but nonsense with therapeutic value. They help one to lever oneself out of a certain form of intellectual bewitchment, and it is only having done so that one attains a perspective from which one can recognize them for the meaningless signs they are:

> My propositions are elucidatory (*erläutern*) in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.[14]

Wittgenstein's statement echoes the use of the same metaphor by the Hellenistic Sceptic, Sextus Empiricus:

> Just as it is not impossible for the person who has climbed to a high place with the help of a ladder, to kick over the ladder after the ascent, so there is no reason why the Sceptic, after having achieved—using a ladder as it were—the establishment of his thesis by an argument showing that there is no such thing as a proof, should not then refute that very argument.
>
> (*Against the Mathematicians* 8.481; trans. B. Mates)

The Buddha is fully conscious of the therapeutic value of his words, but he does not for that reason consider his teachings to be nonsensical or capable of refutation; indeed, we are supposing them to be not only meaningful but true. And how does the truth that has helped us make sense of our lives ever come to be seen as something that ought to be discarded? Whatever the Buddha meant about 'abandoning' his teachings, he did not mean abandoning them as false: rather, it must be the case that there are reasons for 'abandoning' even what is true.

[14] *Tractatus* 6.54. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 1922).

2.4 The Buddha's silences

The celebrated scholar and peace activist, Thich Nhat Hanh, recommends that we understand the Buddha's statement in the light of his refusal to answer misleading questions, the famous 'silences' of the Buddha and his more accomplished followers.[15] This returns us to our earlier theme—that the truth can be valued in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons. It is better not to give someone the full and nuanced truth if they are unprepared or not yet disposed to receive it. The truth can come too early: it can be mistimed. Vacchagotta, whose questions about the immortality of the soul and the eternality of the world the Buddha famously refused to answer,[16] would nevertheless later say that the Buddha 'has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark'.[17] In the *Milinda-pañhā*, the Greek King Menander challenges the Buddhist monk Nāgasena to explain how it could be that the Buddha was willing to remain silent and yet also assert that he had nothing to hide, that unlike other teachers he did not keep some things 'in his fist':

> Revered Nāgasena, this too was said by the Lord: 'In regard to the Tathāgata's teachings, Ānanda, there is no "teacher's fist."' On the other hand when the Elder Mālunkyaputta asked the Lord a question he did not answer it. This question, revered Nāgasena, will have two ends on one of which it must rest: either that of not knowing or that of keeping something secret. For if, revered Nāgasena, the Lord said: 'In regard to the Tathāgata's teachings, Ānanda, there is no "teacher's fist,"' well then, it was through not knowing that he did not answer the Elder Mālunkyaputta. But if though he knew he did not answer, well then, in the Tathāgata's teachings there was a 'teacher's fist.' This too is a double-pronged question; it is put to you; it is for you to solve.[18]

How can silence be anything other than a form of secrecy? Apparently only if the person questioned does not know the answer. Compare Clitophon's

[15] Thich Nhat Hanh, *Thundering Silence Thundering Silence: Sutta on Knowing the Better Way to Catch a Snake*, trans. Annabel Laity (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), pp. 37–8.

[16] Dīgha Nikāya i 189; *The Long Discourses of the Buddha,* trans. Maurice Walshe (Boston: Wisdom Books, 1995), p. 164.

[17] Majjhima Nikāya i 489; *The Middle Length Discourses*, p. 594.

[18] *Milinda-pañhā* 4.2.2; trans. I. B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, reprinted 1996), p. 204.

accusation against Socrates: '[O]ne of two things must be true: either you know nothing about it, or you don't wish to share it with me' (*Clitophon* 410c6–7). Nāgasena responds that there are *four* sorts of question: questions that require a definite reply, questions that require an analysis, questions that demand to be met with a counter-question, and, finally, questions that are to be set aside. The questions to be set aside are those there is no cause or reason to answer, for 'there is no utterance or speech of the Buddhas, the Lords, that is without reason, without cause'. Nāgasena's solution, then, is that some questions do not *deserve* an answer and the Buddha would not say something unless there was a point in doing so, the point, for the Buddha, being always related to the perlocutionary effects of his remarks on his audience. It is true that the Buddha does not wish to share his knowledge, but the motivation is not a desire to preserve a secret but rather the wish not to harm his questioner with the truth.[19] (One might compare here our discussion of the sage's reluctance to speak, in chapter 1.) In so choosing to remain silent, however, does the Buddha not conceal the truth when *in his judgement* his teachings will not have the transformative effect intended for them? Clearly, the internal coherence of the Buddha's stance on silence requires that it is not zealotry but compassion which motivates him; his compassion is, as it were, a presupposition for the consistency of his position. Not every silence is a subterfuge; sometimes the silence is sincere. We will see in the next chapter that lying permits of a similar distinction: some lies are acts of manipulation, but others legitimately protect the liar from the interrogations of someone who does not have a right to the truth. The Buddha had no need to worry about the effects of others' words on him, but he did care about the effects his words had on others. This led him to remain silent; we will later ask whether his compassion also led him to lie.

The philosopher Vasubandhu (*c.*360 CE) supplements Nāgasena's response with two further considerations.[20] One is that the Buddha takes into account the intentions and prior beliefs of the questioner in assessing the effect any

[19] Compare Cicero, *De Officiis* 3.50–55: deliberately leading someone into error, even by telling them the truth, is worse than failing to show them the right path. It is better, in that circumstance, to remain silent.

[20] See Vasubandhu, *Adhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu*, critically edited by Dwarkidas Shastri (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1973), pp. 1209–12; trans. James Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's 'Refutation of the Theory of a Self'* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), pp. 89–93.

answer may have on them. These intentions and beliefs may be such that the questioner will misunderstand the answer, though it be true, however it is phrased. Vasubandhu's second addition is to note that some questions are to be set aside, not because the Buddha does not know the answer, but because any answer would commit him to knowledge that is not to be had. The Buddha refused to answer the question 'What happens to a man after he dies?', and it is the case neither that he knows what happens but refuses to say, nor that he does not know what happens; rather, any answer would commit him to knowing there is *something* that happens, and, for the Buddha, this is not a fact available to be known. To put it another way, questions are implicit arguments, and answers can only confirm or deny the validity of the argument implicit in the question but not challenge the truth of its premises. When the person answering the question believes that one of its implicit premises is false, the only option is to remain silent.[21]

Better, then, in some cases to keep quiet. But a refusal to speak the truth is not a refusal to value it. In an important recent study of the value of truth, Bernard Williams claims that there are two basic virtues of truth, which he calls Accuracy and Sincerity: 'you do the best you can to acquire true beliefs, and what you say reveals what you believe'.[22] Accuracy and sincerity, according to Williams, are *virtues* because (roughly speaking) they provide a resistance to a certain inherent tendency towards wilful self-deception, to believe what one *wishes* were true rather than what *is* true. If the Buddha is right, then silence too, on occasion, is a virtue, and sincerity does not imply that you always reveal *the whole* of what you believe. But none of this entitles one to draw a negative inference about the value of accuracy; in particular, it does not follow that accuracy demands that you ought sometimes to *relinquish* hard-won true beliefs. The Buddha's 'thundering silence' cannot explain or justify a disvaluation of truth. It still

[21] For a thorough discussion of the four sorts of answer: K. N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), pp. 281–93, 470–6; a useful chart of the possible reasons for 'setting aside' a question by remaining silent is given on p. 472. The one possibility we have not considered here is that the answer is not merely unknown but unknowable, that it lies beyond the limits of possible knowledge. Jayatilleke suggests that the Pāli Nikāya so regards the problem of the origin, duration and extent of the cosmos. See also Hermann Beckh, *Buddhismus (Buddha und seine lehre)* (Berlin and Leipzig: Sammlung Göschen, 1919), vol. 1, p. 120; Gadjin M. Nagao, 'The silence of the Buddha', in his *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 35–50.

[22] Bernard Williams, *Truth & Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 11.

matters that the Buddha's teaching is true, even if this is sometimes a truth best left unspoken.

What an appreciation of the virtue of silence does explain is the nature of Ariṭṭha's crime. Ariṭṭha failed to understand the close relationship between sincerity and receptivity and this was a failure in his compassion. For there are, as we have said, dangers in thinking that one has reached the truth (especially about oneself) too soon, before one is fully receptive to that truth; this is a form of self-deception one must guard oneself against. Compassion requires that one is in this matter a guardian for others—one does not confront them with a truth (for instance, about themselves) to which they are not yet able to be fully receptive. Compassion implies that a concern for receptivity (thinking about what others are in a position to be receptive to) constrains sincerity, and from this it follows that in some cases sincerity implies silence. Along with sincerity and accuracy, receptivity is a central virtue of truth. The virtue of silence is an exercise in moral judgement, knowing when it is better to speak and when to keep quiet, a capacity for what is sometimes termed 'discretion'.

2.5 Is the truth of merely instrumental value?

In the *Snake Sutta* there seems to be a *double* revaluation of the value of truth. The lesson of the simile of the snake is that a distinction has to be drawn between a right and a wrong attitude to the value of truth. Wrong would be to take an interest in the truth merely for the sake of winning debates; wrong too would be to think that the truth must always be told, that the value of truth is unconditional (this, we speculated, was Ariṭṭha's 'crime'). The right attitude towards the value of truth makes of it something that is 'conducive to the good', which the simile of the raft further explicates as something that is conducive to 'crossing over'. The right attitude, we suggested, was a matter of receptivity and openness with regard to the truth. Receptivity is not only a question of accuracy, doing one's best to acquire true beliefs. It demands something more—that one does not insulate a hard-won true belief from the rest of one's mental life, that one permit the truth to run riot in the soul.

If this was the first revaluation of the value of truth, the second, coming at the end of the simile of the raft, told us that one who has 'crossed over'

must abandon even the true teachings of the Buddha. That looks, on the face of it, not so much a revaluation as a devaluation of truth and we struggled to see how such an attitude could be warranted by any argument in the *Sutta*. We were puzzled too about the implication that the value of truth, even when it has one, is merely instrumental, an expedient for the crossing, an idea that carries with it the further implication that it is not so much the truth as the *utility* of the Buddha's teaching to which value is being assigned.

The Buddha, clearly, does not regard the truth even of his own teachings as having an unconditional value. The truth is not a holy grail, something to which everything else has to be sacrificed. So the value of truth is conditional. But here we must be careful. Denying that the value of truth is unconditional ought not to be taken as implying that the truth has a value only if a certain condition is met, and otherwise has *no* value. Rather, it implies that *what* value the truth has is dependent on *what* condition is met; the truth has different values in different conditions. The Buddha's view is that the value of truth is subject to the condition that it is conducive to well-being, and, since what a person's well-being involves depends on their stage along the path, the value of truth is conditional on a stage of life. For someone still locked in a naïve hedonism, the truth must serve to 'bring them up sharp'—that is why the Buddha declared simply and straightforwardly that pleasure is an obstruction, and the episode with Ariṭṭha showed that he was unafraid to use his authority and status to drive the message home. For someone who is further along the Buddhist path, the value of truth is different. Its value now consists in the aid it affords in 'keeping one on the straight and narrow', helping one to lead a good life, and even, as Williams suggests, defending against the allures of self-deception. Finally, for someone who has crossed over, who is living a life of enlightened awakening, the value of truth is different again. Such a person no longer needs to be kept on the straight and narrow and to defend against the risks of self-deception—they have already made the dispositions that inform their character harmonize with the ideals of virtuous conduct (*śīla*). The truth we suppose has a different role in the internal management of their lives; what that role is, the *Snake Sutta* does not say. In chapter 4, I will describe the answer provided by later Buddhist philosophers.

The point is that the value of truth is *internal* to a stage of life. The value of truth is internal and conditional, but not for that reason instrumental;

it is a mistake to conflate the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental goods with the different distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods and so to overlook the existence of non-instrumental but extrinsic values.[23] The value of truth, as the similes of the snake and the raft powerfully remind us, is a value of just this sort. In and of itself, the truth is of indeterminate value; when it comes to have a definite value it is not as a means to some end but as one value among others, whose internal relationship with one another decides what it is for a given life to make sense to the person living it. (I follow up this idea in Appendix D.)

Only at our peril does each of us conclude too soon that we have found the great truth about ourselves, the truth of who we are; it takes time for that truth to form and organize itself within us. The nuanced truth about ourselves, our condition, our lives and aspirations, should not come too soon, before we are receptive to it, before we can let it 'blow through' us. Indeed, were it to come too soon, we would not even recognize it as such; or else, it would mislead us. When it does come, its effect will be transformative; indeed, its arrival is only the beginning. If receptivity—openness to the truth—is one hard-won intellectual virtue, then so too is the capacity to allow the truth to 'keep growing deep down' (see further, chapter 4). This is the 'crossing', a stage of life in which the truth has its own distinctive value. In the end, when the truth about ourselves has played itself out wholly within us, what then do we become? The Buddha said that one who has 'crossed over' *abandons* even his own true teachings; but to abandon the truth is not to decide that the teachings are false after all, nor is it to decide that they no longer matter. Rather, within a transformed life in which their impact has been already fully felt, a continued attachment to the truths taught by the Buddha would run *against* the demand for receptivity, closing down rather than keeping open the transformed mind, pulling it out of shape. The second revaluation of the value of truth—detachment—is itself explained by the first—receptivity. The truths of the Path, previously thought to comprise the whole of the truth, are now seen for what they are, a part but only a part of the truth. So the lesson *we* learn from the similes of the snake and the raft is that receptivity is a cardinal virtue of truth.

[23] See Christine Korsgaard, 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', *Philosophical Review* 92 (1983): 169–95.

2.6 Truths, two and four

It is by no means an accident that the Buddha called the final distillation of his teachings the Four Great and Noble *Truths* (*ārya-satya*). Here is how they are described in the *Sutta on the Exposition of the Truths*:

And what, friends, is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering; ageing is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering. This is called the noble truth of suffering.

And what, friends, is the noble truth of the origin of suffering? It is craving, which brings renewal of being, is accompanied by delight and lust, and delights in this and that; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for being, and craving for non-being. This is called the noble truth of the origin of suffering.

And what, friends, is the noble truth of the cessation of suffering? It is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, relinquishing, letting go, and rejecting of that same craving. This is called the noble truth of the cessation of suffering.

And what, friends, is the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering? It is just this Noble Eightfold Path; that is, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This is called the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.[24]

Sometimes the truth comes to us covered up, at other times it is laid bare. Just as a table covered over by a cloth is still seen as a table, and a person wrapped up in shawls is still seen as a person, so too a truth 'covered up' is still seen as a truth. Not every guise is a *dis*guise. There is indeed a sense in which to cloak the truth (for example, in concepts) is to conceal it; but, importantly, there is also a sense in which this 'concealing' is not so as to remove it from view. Sometimes, indeed, the truth 'in wraps' (*saṃvṛti-satya*) is more palatable, more inviting, than the truth exposed in its stark and unadorned immediacy, even if this raw truth lays things out in their full significance (*paramārtha-satya*). From the *Snake Sutta* we learn that at least some of the Buddha's teachings are themselves 'truths in wraps'; in particular, the truth of the Path, as it is so beautifully portrayed in the metaphor of the raft, is of this kind—a truth 'made respectable', and,

[24] Majjhima Nikāya iii 248–52; *The Middle Length Discourses*, pp. 1097–1101.

in being respectable, so much the more acceptable to an adept on the Path. Prajñākaramati, an eleventh-century Indian Buddhist writing from a Mādhyamika perspective, says of the Four Noble Truths that only the third, cessation, is a truth unadorned and ultimate—the truths of suffering, its origin, and the path leading to its removal, are truths indeed, but truths tailored to and made adequate for the common world of ordinary life:

It has been explained by the Lord that there are four noble truths, whose defining characteristics are suffering, origination, cessation and the path. How, then, can there be just two truths?... It is because of their being included in the two, in this manner: the truths of suffering, origination, and the path, being essentially 'concealing' (*saṃvṛti*), are included in the truth of concealment, and the truth of cessation in the truth of ultimate significance ... *saṃvṛti* is one truth, inerrant, and *paramārtha* is the other truth ... In this connection, the truth of concealment is the 'not inadequate' form of the common world. The truth of ultimate significance is the true reality of the nobles.[25]

A truth 'in wraps', such as the truth of the Path, is not a mere illusion or false belief in what is non-existent because it does well enough in ordinary circumstances.[26] The effectiveness of such a truth is a sign that there is a real truth underneath the wrapping, even if it is not a truth 'in the raw'. That it works is the sign that underneath the clothing there is something true. The Buddha's teachings about the Path are not a mere expediency whose truth or falsity is irrelevant to their utility. They are truths wrapped up in the clothes best suited to one particular stage of life.

[25] Poussin observes that the early texts and the Chinese sources consider four possibilities: that the final two of the Four Noble Truths are *paramārtha*; that only the truth of the path is; that only the principle 'everything is without self' is; and, finally, that all four are both *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha*. He then adds, 'la Vibhāṣā ignore une cinquieme opinion: que la troisieme vérité ... seule est *paramārtha*'; Louis de la Vallée Poussin, 'Documents d'Abhidharma: les deux, les quatre, les trois vérités', *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques* 5 (1937): 159–87. For further comment: John B. Buescher, *Echoes from an Empty Sky: The Origins of the Buddhist Doctrine of the Two Truths* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 2005), pp. 73–6. Prajñākaramati's commentary to Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.2–4 is translated by Matthew Kapstein in *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 217–18.

[26] Phyllis Granoff points out that Śāntideva's interpreter Prajñākaramati and his near contemporary Śrīharṣa reach a common understanding of this point: both distinguish carefully between the *saṃvṛti-sat* and the merely fictional, and thereby diffuse the criticisms of Kumārila, Udayana and others. The two 'truths' are not two levels of reality, but two ways of comprehending a single reality. See her *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrīharṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 84–5. We might compare a craftsman's way of comprehending Pythagoras' Theorem with that of a mathematician, or the use of polar versus scalar coordinates. On Kumārila and the Buddhists, see further chapter 4 below; and on Udayana and the Vedāntins, chapter 5.

We return, finally, to the simile of the snake, a simile that the great Nāgārjuna (c. 100 CE) picks up and relates to the doctrine of the two truths, in the course of a discussion of the Four Noble Truths:

[Objection:] If all of this is empty, neither arising, nor ceasing, then for you, it follows that the Four Noble Truths do not exist.... [Reply:] The Buddha's teachings are based on two truths: a truth of worldly correlation, concealment, convention (*saṃvṛti-satya*)[27] and an ultimate, foundational truth (*paramārtha-satya*). Those who do not understand the distinction drawn between these two truths do not understand the Buddha's profound (*gambhīra*) teaching. Without a foundation in convention (*vyavahāra*), the significance of the ultimate cannot be taught. Without understanding the significance of the ultimate, liberation is not achieved. Misperceiving emptiness, a dull-witted person is destroyed. Like a snake incorrectly seized, or like a spell incorrectly cast.[28]

In the *Ratnāvalī*, Nāgārjuna reminds us how the Buddha at first despaired of trying to teach a truth that is too hard for almost anybody to understand, and yet very dangerous if misunderstood, especially if misunderstood as a kind of nihilism.[29] It is easy to hear in the Buddha's declarations about no-self and emptiness a claim to the effect that the world as it appears is a mere illusion, a doctrine that leads to pessimism and passivism, or else in the direction of a hope for transcendental salvation. But these declarations, Nāgārjuna makes clear, have to be understood for what they are: truths wrapped up in the clothes best suited to fulfil particular propaedeutic needs. The doctrine of 'two truths' is a hermeneutical device, a resource the interpreter brings to bear in correctly figuring out the meaning of the Buddha's words and the status of his teachings, certainly not to be confused with the philosophical distinction between appearance and reality. The revaluation of truth the Buddha prescribes consists not in an *abandonment* of

[27] In his commentary, Candrakīrti identifies 'completely concealing' (*samantād avacchādana*) or 'completely covering' (*samantād varaṇa*) as one of three etymological meanings of the term *saṃvṛti*, the other two being 'mutual correlation' (*paraspara-sambhavana*) and 'worldly behaviour and convention', including conventions of speech and thought (*saṅketo lokavyavahāra*). *Prasannapadā* B 492. The weight each of these meaning receives, in any given context of use, varies.

[28] *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.1, 8–11. *Madhyamakaś āstra of Nāgārjuna, with the Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti*, ed. P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1987), pp. 237, 240–1. Trans. Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1995), slightly modified.

[29] *Ratnāvalī* 2, 17–22. Trans. Jeffrey Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1998), p. 111.

the conventional, transactional and concealing, but in an *acknowledgement* of it for what it is—truth, yes, but truth concealed.[30]

The problem of the compassionate lie, the question of the Buddha's truthfulness, and the distinction between emptiness and illusion in thinking about the self, are topics that were considerably to exercise later Buddhist philosophers. Before examining their discussion, it is as well to remind ourselves about the broader Indian philosophical context in which their ideas developed. So, in the next chapter, I will examine in some detail the morality of truth-telling, the fight against illusion, and the elusiveness of truth, as these themes are explored in one of the two great Indian epics, the *Mahābhārata*. With this text too, as with the early Upaniṣads and the Buddha's Discourses, we shall have cause to wonder *why* the narrative took the form it did, what communication with its audience it was thereby, indirectly, trying to achieve, and what impact, if any, it sought to have on their sense of self.

[30] See Candrakīrti under MK 24, 11 (B 495): The sage does not resist the concealing, conventional world but recognizes it for what it is; the unwise cling to and dwell on the doctrine of emptiness. I will discuss Candrakīrti in more detail in chapters 4 and 7.

3

A Cloak of Clever Words: The Deconstruction of Deceit in the Mahābhārata

> Perhaps this pool revealed the essential mode of our existence, in its constant flow, its disturbing opposites locked in combat…
>
> David Shulman, *Telugu Poetry*

If the Buddha and the Upaniṣadic sage have recognizable literary profiles, so too do Kṛṣṇa, Rāma and the other heroes of the great Indian epics. Kṛṣṇa in particular, once aptly described as a 'devious divinity',[1] is an enigmatic subject for moral reflection. If the ambiguity in the advice he offers in song to Arjuna were not enough, his interventions later on in the *Mahābhārata* envelop him in still deeper obscurity. Why would he encourage Arjuna into a course of action whose outcome would be the mass carnage of all that both held dear? Why would he advocate levels of trickery and deception that *seem* to violate all the accepted rules on proper conduct? While the sages of the Upaniṣads kept their own counsel, and the Buddha gave counsel skilfully, the counsel afforded by the epic hero is just plain obscure. We, the audience, struggle to make sense of it; we are baffled. And it must be admitted that bafflement, like wonder, is a powerful stimulus to philosophical inquiry: if all is not in order, we are encouraged to

[1] B. K. Matilal, 'Kṛṣṇa: In defence of a devious divinity', in his *Epics and Ethics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 2002), pp. 91–108. John Smith has recently argued that the character-centred inconsistences in the representation of the leading figures of the epic might be the product, not of complex characterizations, but rather of what he calls 'paratactic aggregation'—the assembling of individually true statements in no particular order. Whether or not this is correct, and I have reservations, my focus in this chapter is not on the explanation of the structural arrangement of the text but on its overall effect, as it is, upon readers. John Smith, 'Consistency and character in the Mahābhārata', *Proceedings of the 13th World Sanskrit Conference, Edinburgh, 10–14 July 2006.*

worry away at what will make sense. The epic, in other words, is another exhortation to inquiry.

3.1 Myth-making in the *Mahābhārata*

The *Mahābhārata* (*c.* 200 BCE—100 CE)[2] is an epic tale of illusion, deceit and the manipulation of myth. As an outstanding literary-cum-philosophico-religious masterpiece, the *Mahābhārata* raises important issues to do with the relation between narrative form and philosophical theory. My discussion will focus on the battle against illusion, the grand theme of a narrative in which a battlefield stands in two homologies, one with the cosmos, the other with the self. Nowhere is this theme more visible than in the story of Droṇa in the *Droṇaparvan*.[3] There, the morality of deception is investigated simultaneously on four levels, through the respective powers of four myth-makers. There is, first of all and most obviously, Yudhiṣṭhira himself, whose false words induce Droṇa to lay down his weapons. In the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira the story explores the morality of myth-making between individuals, the virtues of trust and truthfulness, and the shame and remorse involved in their violation. Kṛṣṇa, Bhīma and Arjuna embody different ethical voices: Kṛṣṇa for a straight deception; Bhīma for a 'crooked' deception that pretends not to be one; and Arjuna for no deception at all. Yudhiṣṭhira might have preserved his moral integrity and saved himself from shame, had he followed the counsel either of Kṛṣṇa or of Arjuna, but in opting instead for Bhīma's slippery double deceit (hiding both the truth and the fact of deception), he displays the moral weakness with which he is often associated.

Myth-making at another level is woven into the fabric of the story, the great battle between Pāṇḍava and Kaurava. The weapons of battle, in fact,

[2] This date is based on A. Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 18–20. Hiltebeitel's suggestion is that it was written 'between the mid-second century BCE and the year zero'. The date of transcription is, however, distinct from the date of composition. John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 26, observes that 'the origins of the *Mahābhārata* fall somewhere between he 8th and 9th century [BCE]. However, we do not have nearly so old a text... [t]here is therefore general agreement that the oldest parts preserved are not likely to be appreciably older than about 400 BCE. However, the *Mahābhārata* has undergone so many reworkings that old and new are by now perhaps inextricably mixed.'

[3] *The Mahābhārata*, critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar and S. K. Belvalkar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1958), vol. 9, fasc. 29B: *Droṇaparvan*, Part. 3B.

as we will see really *are* myths and illusions, summoned up by mantras to envelop the enemy in a cloud of deception. Droṇa is, in this sense, a great myth-maker, but greater still is his son Aśvatthāman at whose invocation the deadly *nārāyaṇa* itself is deployed. In this great battle for truth, the power of the weapon is in proportion to the legitimacy of the illusion that sustains it (and there are powerful weapons on both sides).

The third myth-maker is our storyteller Vyāsa, who, extraordinarily, has himself enter as a character within his own story. On the road, Vyāsa meets first Aśvatthāman and then Arjuna, and to each one he *retells* the tale of the mighty battle in the form of a cosmological allegory. Here we see the storyteller in the very act of practising his craft, giving Aśvatthāman and Arjuna subtly different versions of the story, manufacturing in them different understandings of the moral foundations of what has taken place. More than that: all this is done in front of us, the readers, for he is showing off his myth-making skills with the help of the literary device that has himself enter the plot; here is another case of a text which embeds instructions to the reader about the way it is meant to be read.[4] Vyāsa is revealing to us what this story is all about—the clash of illusions, the fight of illusion *by* illusion, the elusiveness of truth—themes that we will examine again, from other perspectives, in Part II of this book.

The battle takes on cosmogonic dimensions when, in Vyāsa's retelling, a fourth myth-maker is introduced in the shape of Rudra, the lord of creation, who has the power to determine each individual's relationship with the world 'from the outside' as it were—that is, by creating the *world* they inhabit. To one individual alone the creator gives the power to refashion the relationship that has been created. This is Nārāyaṇa who is twinned with Nara who is equated with Arjuna, who therefore alone can defeat Aśvatthāman's mighty arsenal of illusion. God has fashioned a correspondence of word and world, but man can refashion it; God has created a moral order, but man has to recreate it. Truth and morals are god-given, but God has also given to man a greater gift, the power to rework truth and morals when the times require it, to repair God's work, to refine his first approximation.[5] The storyteller, the magic-maker and

[4] See also Alf Hiltebeitel, 'Not without subtales: telling laws and truths in the Sanskrit epics', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (2005): 455–511.

[5] On the idea of Vedic ritual as repairing God's flawed creation: Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

the world-creator have this in common, then—they give to their created characters the power to retell the story, reverse the illusion, and so revise themselves and their relationship with the world.

The turning point of the great battle, one of the central axes around which the story revolves, is a lie Yudhiṣṭhira utters, a lie born of desperation in the face of otherwise certain defeat. Was it right for Yudhiṣṭhira, exemplar of the virtue of truth, so to deceive his own teacher Droṇa? Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Bhīma thrash out the moral case for and against. In the end, what seems most worthy of censure is not the lie itself but Yudhiṣṭhira's vain attempt to represent his lie as a truth, to deceive himself about his own expedient lapse of virtue.[6] Arjuna will later describe this as covering a lie with the truth, as if with an armour skin. In lying to himself about his lie, Yudhiṣṭhira reveals himself as having neither the clear moral pragmatism of Kṛṣṇa, nor yet Arjuna's unwavering moral integrity. We will learn from the *Mahābhārata* that, if deception per se is in certain rare cases morally permissible, deceiving oneself is always destructive of the soul.

3.2 The enigmatic advice of a devious divinity

Droṇa's murder has been foretold already. Much earlier in the *Mahābhārata*, on the eve of the mighty battle between Pāṇḍava and Kaurava, warring factions of a divided family, Arjuna succumbs to the force of moral scruple. He is unwilling to take up arms against Droṇa, who was the teacher of the Pāṇḍava brothers in the arts of weaponry, if not in the crafts of moral reason:

'How can I fight back at Bhīṣma with my arrows in battle, or at Droṇa, Madhusūdana? Both deserve my homage, enemy-slayer! It were better that without slaying my gurus I went begging instead for alms in this land than that I by slaying my covetous gurus indulge in the joys that are dipped in their blood. And we do not know what is better for us: that we defeat them or they defeat us; Dhṛtarāṣṭra's men are positioned before us, after killing whom we have nothing to live for. My nature afflicted with the vice of despair, my mind confused over what is the Law (*dharma*), I ask, what is better? Pray tell me for sure, pray guide

[6] That is to say, the fault is seen to lie in his inauthenticity rather than his insincerity. On the importance of that distinction, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

me, your student who asks for your help! There is nothing I see that might dispel this sorrow that desiccates my senses, if on earth I were to obtain without rivals a kingdom, nay even the reign of the Gods!' Having spoken thus to Hṛṣīkeśa, enemy-burner Guṣākeśa said to Govinda, 'I will not fight!' and fell silent.[7]

Viewed in its entirety, the *Bhagavadgītā* is a prelude to Droṇa's murder, an anticipation of the moral quandary his existence will cause for the Pāṇḍava brothers Yudhiṣṭhira, Arjuna and Bhīma. Kṛṣṇa gives counsel, and we shall have reason to see that his persuasiveness secures only the acquiescence but not the moral acceptance of Arjuna. When Droṇa is killed, Arjuna will regard himself and the whole Pāṇḍava army as condemned to hell by the way that act was performed. And is the assessment of the poet Vyāsa very different when, having had Droṇa very conspicuously ascend to heaven, he endows his son Aśvatthāman with a *nārāyaṇa*, the supreme weapon of divine retribution? If, in the end, Vyāsa permits the Pāṇḍava brothers to remain alive, surveying the mass carnage on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra, it seems to be only in order that he have someone there able to give voice to the folly of their ways.

The *Droṇaparvan* is the chronicle of a death foretold. It begins with Duryodhana, eldest of one hundred brothers, the one hundred sons of the blind king Dhṛtaṛāṣṭra who commands the Kaurava army. Duryodhana, fearful of losing the battle, hits upon an ingenious but disingenuous subterfuge. He directs Droṇa to secure the capture of Yudhiṣṭhira, whom he can then command to tell the Pāṇḍavas to surrender. For Yudhiṣṭhira, he reasons, is known for his impeccable truthfulness and the Pāṇḍavas will certainly believe something that is told by him. Duryodhana, in other words, connives to exploit Yudhiṣṭhira's virtue, to bend it against him and into his own service. The success of his scheme requires that Droṇa take Yudhiṣṭhira alive, and this Droṇa vows to do. Twice early on Droṇa encounters Yudhiṣṭhira, and twice apparently tries with all his considerable might to kill him, fortunately for his own vow without success. Once Arjuna encounters Droṇa and Droṇa flees while Arjuna appeals for him to stay a while and talk. We can only speculate what Arjuna might have said and whether he might have been able to avert with words and worldly reason what was instead to come. Droṇa flees, but with his expertise in

[7] *Bhagavadgītā* [BG] 2.4–9. Trans. J. A. B. van Buitenen, *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata: Text and Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

the theory and practice of weaponry and with the Kaurava army at his command, he begins to overwhelm the Pāṇḍava troops. The Pāṇḍavas are afraid, and Arjuna who alone among them possesses the skill to defeat his teacher still refuses to fight. Kṛṣṇa chooses this of all moments to speak to Arjuna again, this time with an astonishingly base suggestion:

He cannot in any way be defeated by force in battle. Casting aside virtue (*dharma*), O Pāṇḍavas, resort to a method fit for victory, so that Droṇa might not kill everyone in battle. I think that he will not fight if [his son] Aśvatthāman were killed. Let some man say that he has been slain in battle.

(MB 7.164.67–69)

Although it is not included in the stemma of the critical edition, many manuscripts, indeed all except the Kaśmīrī, insert after 7.164.67ab the following line: 'With weaponry cast down, he can be killed in battle by mortal men' (see 1305*, p. 953). The enigma that accompanies Kṛṣṇa's advice is evident even in the manuscript variants. If, with the editors of the critical edition, we choose to follow the Kaśmīrī recension and omit the interpolated line, then Kṛṣṇa's recommendation is only that Droṇa be disarmed and not that he be killed. This is a position which permits Kṛṣṇa a little more moral leeway than any of the other recensions, Northern or Southern, which force Kṛṣṇa to assume full complicity in the murder of Droṇa, casting him as entirely conscious of the mortal consequences of his recommendation.

Be that as it may, the varied responses from the three present Pāṇḍava brothers to Kṛṣṇa's devious proposal reveal a great deal about their respective moral voices. Arjuna immediately and unequivocally dissents. Yudhiṣṭhira hesitates and falteringly condones. Bhīma embraces the idea and with enthusiasm makes it his own. He kills an elephant belonging to the Pāṇḍava army, whose name happens also to be Aśvatthāman, and then announces to Yudhiṣṭhira that Aśvatthāman has been slain. Our narrator Vyāsa tells us that Bhīma, 'keeping in his mind the fact that it was an elephant by the name of "Aśvatthāman" that had been killed, spoke falsely' (7.164.73). Droṇa falters but is not duped. Indeed, he is provoked into going on a rampage, massacring large parts of the Pāṇḍava force and strewing the earth with their remains. Now, curiously, the noble sages of old are made to enter the field, wherein they entreat Droṇa to desist from his extremely barbaric acts, which, they reason, are both unjust and unbecoming of a

brahmin. Droṇa begins seriously to question the rectitude of his behaviour and to wonder whether it is perhaps true what Bhīma said. He begins to worry, we might say, whether he is rightly avenging a deceit or wrongly perpetrating an atrocity while in denial about the truth concerning his son. In this state of moral perplexity he turns to Yudhiṣṭhira, whom he believes would never tell a lie. It would appear that Kṛṣṇa also thinks Droṇa believes this, for he now inveighs Yudhiṣṭhira as he had previously done Arjuna:

> If Droṇa fights in anger for even half a day, I say truly that your army will meet with destruction. To protect us from Droṇa, a falsehood (*anṛta*) is better than the truth (*satya*). A falsehood uttered for the sake of a life is untouched by falsehood.
>
> (7.164.98–99)

Bhīma joins in, telling Yudhiṣṭhira about the dead elephant Aśvatthāman, and Yudhiṣṭhira crumbles:

> Sinking in fear of untruth but addicted to the victory, Yudhiṣṭhira, equivocating, spoke out of turn and said, 'Lord, [he] is slain, the elephant (*kuñjara*) (*avaktavyam abravid rājan hataḥ kuñjara ity uta*).
>
> (7.164.106cd)

Arjuna will say that this statement covers a lie with the truth, as if with an armour-skin or cuirass. Be that as it may (see below), Yudhiṣṭhira's improper words do the trick: Droṇa collapses in grief and, laying down his weapons, assumes the posture of a yogin. But in a dramatic metaphor, Vyāsa conveys to us Yudhiṣṭhira's fall from grace. His chariot which had up until now floated a few inches above the earth's surface, abruptly crashes to the ground! Yudhiṣṭhira will never again be taken at his word. Nor will things go as planned for the Pāṇḍavas. For it will turn out that the vengeance of the real Aśvatthāman is mightier than anything the Pāṇḍava conspirators had foreseen. Only Arjuna's last-minute intervention will save them from complete annihilation. And we shall have cause to wonder whether or not it was Kṛṣṇa who created this mess, provoking Aśvatthāman into avenging his father, discrediting Yudhiṣṭhira, and putting Arjuna in an impossible moral position from which he would emerge wishing only for death. In the final analysis, is it not Kṛṣṇa upon whose head falls the moral responsibility for this result?

How, indeed, is Kṛṣṇa's advice here consistent with his own counsel on the eve of the mighty battle, when Arjuna was wracked with doubt about the morality of the war and his own part in it? It is hard to recognize

here the supposedly 'deontological' Kṛṣṇa, who lectured on the virtues of detached action in the *Bhagavadgītā*.[8] There, he seemed to offer Arjuna quite different advice, albeit still exhorting him to fight. The advice he gave there is that all action motivated by desire for the fruits or results of one's actions leads only to further desires and so, ultimately to the propagation of suffering. For one can never satisfy all one's desires, and the more one acts with the hope of getting rewards, the more one is liable to disappointment and frustration, and eventually the destruction of one's self:

> When a man thinks about sense objects, an interest in them develops. From this interest grows desire, from desire anger; from anger rises delusion (*saṃmoha*), from delusion loss of memory, from loss of memory the death of the intellect (*buddhi*), and from the death of the intellect one perishes.
>
> (BG 2. 62–3)

If the doctrine of *karma* is right, that we are made into what we are by the deeds we do (see Appendix B), then it seems that those who make morality regulative of their activities will achieve integrated and stable selves, in the sense of having well-coordinated projects, plans and interests. Morality would not undermine our interests, but would rather be the necessary condition for there to be a harmony among them, of the type that pursuit of our overall good requires. But Kṛṣṇa argues that none of this matters; for any goal-directed activity, if motivated by the desire to achieve one's ends, will generate only further discontent and lead eventually to the disintegration of the self as the locus of a unified set of purposes. How then ought one motivate oneself to act, if not from a desire for the results of the action? What Kṛṣṇa claims in the *Bhagavadgītā* is that the only virtuous action is action free from desire for any result (*niṣkāmakarma*):

> Your entitlement is only to the action, not ever at all to its fruits. Be not motivated by the fruits of acts, but also do not purposely seek to avoid acting.
>
> (*BG* 2. 47)

If action based on desire for its results leads only to a disintegration of the soul, and 'non-action', the way of the ascetic and renouncer, is also

[8] On the deontological Kṛṣṇa: Amartya Sen, 'Consequential evaluation and practical reason', *Journal of Philosophy* 97 (2000): 477–502; but cf. Amber Carpenter, 'Questioning Kṛṣṇa's Kantianism', in Kim-Chong Chong and Yuli Liu (eds), *Conceptions of Virtue East and West* (Singapore: Cavendish Academic, 2005), pp. 83–102.

ruled out, then what is left? Kṛṣṇa, I think, transforms the idea that deliberative action is related to self-constitution, as that was described, for example, by the sage Yājñavalkya. For instead of saying that it is the pursuit of a coherent set of projects that leads to an integrated and stable self, Kṛṣṇa says that this is a function achieved by performing the action itself, freed from all consideration of its karmic results. Deliberative action alone is what holds things together, and makes a person 'joined up' (*yukta*):

> The joined up man, renouncing the fruits of his acts, reaches the peace of the ultimate foundation, while the disjointed man, who acts on his desires because he is interested in fruits, is fettered by the consequences (*karma*).
>
> (BG 5.12)

And it is by doing the action that is 'natural' or 'proper' to oneself (*svadharma*), that one achieves this:

> Each man attains perfection by devoting himself to his own task: listen how the man who shoulders his task finds this perfection.
>
> (BG 18.45)

In summary, the attitude of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* seems to be this. We have to act, for action is what holds a person together as a properly integrated agent. But desire for the results of some plan of action cannot be a motivation for acting, since such motivations actually undermine rather than reinforce the agent's integrity. Kṛṣṇa's advice to Arjuna is that he must act instead according to his particular duties and obligations but remain detached from any self-interest in the results of his actions. To act in a way that is true to one's self is what it is to act well, and the consequences, as prescribed by the principle of *karma*, can then only be good. But to be motivated to act by those consequences would be to lose sight of who one is and will lead eventually to the fragmentation of oneself as the source of a coherent set of goals and plans.

Can we find any underlying pattern in these two interventions of Kṛṣṇa, one at the very beginning of the battle and the other near to its end? Appearances notwithstanding, there is indeed a consistency in Kṛṣṇa's characterization. His role in the great epic, it seems, is to oversee the unfolding of a chain of events that is destined to be, and he intervenes whenever human beings threaten to throw things off course, whether it be

because of their moral weakness or indeed because of their moral strength. The battle was meant to take place but Arjuna's moral queasiness and willingness simply to surrender put it in jeopardy right at the outset; the battle was also meant to be won by the Pāṇḍavas and again this 'proper' outcome was thrown into doubt by Droṇa's colossal strength of will. If human beings orient themselves in moral space with the *compass* of duty and rule, Kṛṣṇa represents orientation by the *polestar*, seeing to it that the final destination is reached even if the path taken must sometimes meander and backtrack.

3.3 Morality in the making: was Yudhiṣṭhira right to deceive?

Seeing Droṇa assume the defenceless pose of a yogin, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, whom Bhīma has earlier deputized to protect Yudhiṣṭhira, and who is Bhīma's lieutenant in matters both military and moral, attacks, fights and kills Droṇa. Adding insult to injury, Dhṛṣṭadyumna severs Droṇa's head and parades it by its locks, much to the disapproval of the Pāṇḍava troops and of Arjuna in particular, who, we are later informed, had cried out to Dhṛṣṭadyumna not to kill Droṇa but to bring him alive. Droṇa ascends to the realm of Brahmā, but his ascent is witnessed only by Sañjaya, Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira and Kṛṣṇa (and possibly also Aśvatthāman); nobody else knows. Indeed, following Droṇa's murder (moral) panic sets in, causing disarray within the Kaurava army. Seeing this, and apparently unaware of his father's death, Aśvatthāman asks Duryodhana why the Kaurava troops are fleeing, and upon hearing the entire story, delivers the first of several moral assessments of the event:

I have heard of the ignoble, wicked deed perpetrated by that impersonator of virtue, and I have heard of that very cruel 'son of virtue' (*dharmaputra*, i.e. Yudhiṣṭhira). For those engaged in warfare, either victory or defeat is certain—one of these two must occur. There [in warfare], killing will be praised. Such killing of a fighter in battle as is in accordance with the rules is not worthy of grief, for it is thus seen by the sages. No doubt, my father has gone to the world of heroes. Reaching such an end, that best of men ought not be mourned. But the trustworthy and rightfully engaged [Droṇa] was seen by the whole army to have his hair grasped, and that cuts me to the core. From love or hate or contempt or pride or even immaturity,

people perform unjust deeds, as again from disrespect.[9] Dhṛṣṭadyumna will see its very dreadful consequences; and so, having acted with the greatest ignobility, will the false-speaking Pāṇḍava. The earth will today drink the blood of that 'lord of virtue' who, by deceit (*chadmanā*), made the teacher surrender his weapons.

(MB 7.166.19–27)

Aśvatthāman's moral evaluation is very interesting. Blame does not attach as such to Dhṛṣṭadyumna for killing Droṇa, for there is nothing immoral about killing one's enemies in battle. Blame does attach to Dhṛṣṭadyumna for humiliating Droṇa after death and it attaches too to Yudhiṣṭhira for the deceit that made Droṇa's death unfair. Aśvatthāman holds Yudhiṣṭhira morally responsible for the murder. Any attempt to defend Yudhiṣṭhira with the argument that Droṇa's death was an unintended outcome of his actual intention, which was only to make Droṇa desist from battle—an appeal to the 'doctrine of double effect'—is categorically rejected here. Precisely because Yudhiṣṭhira resorted to deceit, he is morally responsible for the 'double effect' his misdeed produced.[10] Aśvatthāman will not permit Yudhiṣṭhira to shirk responsibility, either through the connivance of the muttered word 'elephant' which clothed Yudhiṣṭhira in false virtue or because someone else did the actual killing. Yudhiṣṭhira is responsible because Droṇa trusted him, and by trusting him, as it were put himself in Yudhiṣṭhira's care. Yudhiṣṭhira failed in the duty of care his very trustworthiness created. Yudhiṣṭhira did not protect Droṇa, a person he had made dependent on him for protection.

We will see that Arjuna's moral assessment of the episode is a little different. He is soon to be called upon again, for it is now revealed that Aśvatthāman has in his possession a divine weapon known as the *nārāyaṇa*,

[9] Compare Manu 8.117: 'Testimony given through greed, delusion, fear, friendship, lust, anger, ignorance, or immaturity is considered false.' Trans. Patrick Olivelle, *Manu's Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[10] Kant would use the same argument. Indeed, Kant distinguishes between open, truthful, enmity, and enmity that is concealed, deceptive: 'There is a distinction to be drawn between a true and an insidious enemy. Fawning, secret and cunning enmity appears far baser than open malevolence, even when coupled with power; for the latter one may guard against, as one cannot against deceitful malice, which subverts all confidence in men, in a way that open enmity does not. He who openly declares himself an enemy can be depended on; but cunning and secret malignity, were it to become general, would put an end to all trust. We despise it more than the violent kind, for the deceitful one is utterly worthless and base, and has not a spark of goodness in him. The avowed villain can still be tamed, and his savagery taken from him; but he who has no good in him at all can be given none.' Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 194.

a weapon Aśvatthāman received from his father Droṇa who was himself given it by the lord of all creation, Nārāyaṇa, in return for his piety. The *nārāyaṇa* is a weapon so powerful that it can slay the unslayable and its chief feature is that it will turn upon its owner if used unfairly, injudiciously or repeatedly. That too is its symbolic function—it is a weapon that represents the reversal of fortunes, the inversion of fate; as a weapon of illusion, the illusion it stands for is the mirror image. Sure enough, the employment of the *nārāyaṇa* soon results in an inversion of fortunes for the two warring factions: now it is the Pāṇḍava troops who flee from the battle in a state of disarray and defeat, now it is Yudhiṣṭhira who inquires, as Aśvatthāman had done before, as to the cause of his army's (moral) panic. Replying, Arjuna delivers up the sternest of rebukes in a speech that is *his* definitive moral assessment of the event:

> You told the teacher a deceit (*mithyā*), your honour, as a means to gain the kingdom. Done by one who knows what is right (*dharmajña*), this is a very great wrong. 'The Pāṇḍava is endowed with all virtues, and he is also my pupil; he will not speak falsely,' such was the opinion he formed of you. You told our teacher that 'the kuñjara is slain;' this being but a falsehood wearing the truth as an armour-skin (*satyakañcukaṃ nāma praviṣṭena tato 'nṛtam*). Laying down his weapons, he became dispassionate and insensible … For even though I cried out mightily as one who loves his teacher, unheeding of his duties, the pupil killed the master.
>
> (7.167.33–41)

> Ignobly and with light heart, we performed that act of treachery against the learned teacher in order to gain the kingdom. My teacher believed that for my love of him I would abandon my sons, brothers, father, wife and indeed life itself. But I neglected him even though he was being killed, because of my desire for the kingdom. Therefore, O mighty king, with head hung down I go to hell. For having caused the death of the unarmed, wise and sagely brahmin teacher, it is better to die than to live.
>
> (7.167.47–50)

Arjuna's verdict is clear—a crime has been committed, the murder of an innocent, pious and unarmed man. The motive was base self-interest, the method was underhand, and the opportunity came when Droṇa disarmed himself. This passage stands in curious relationship to the apparent moral of the *Bhagavadgītā*. Is Arjuna saying that he now regrets taking Kṛṣṇa's advice, allowing himself to be drawn into an unworthy fight simply because he is

a kṣatrīya and that's what kṣatrīyas do? Or is he saying something else, that Kṛṣṇa had taught that one should act without regard for the fruits of one's action, and this cardinal principle of moral motivation has been violated? But it was Kṛṣṇa himself who had urged them to deceive Droṇa. Notice too that Arjuna differs from Aśvatthāman in his moral assessment of the event. While Aśvatthāman had identified the deceit but not the killing of Droṇa as the source of moral injustice, Arjuna locates the injustice in the killing itself. Yudhiṣṭhira is certainly held up for criticism, not because of his fall from truthfulness but because of his complicity in Droṇa's death. Kṛṣṇa had recommended deceit as the only way to make Droṇa desist from his frenzied rampage but he had not said that Droṇa should be killed (not, at least, in the critical edition—this defence of Kṛṣṇa's moral conduct is unavailable in the less forgiving recensions of the text).

It is now Bhīma's turn to provide a moral assessment of Droṇa's death, which in his case takes the form of an apologetics. His principal argument is that Droṇa's behaviour was morally culpable, not because he went on a rampage but because in doing so he violated his caste, behaving more like a kṣatrīya than a brahmin. The Pāṇḍavas, on the other hand, were just doing what kṣatrīyas do. Yudhiṣṭhira, furthermore, had not actually told a lie; rather, he had fought one illusion by means of another:

> You cut us to the core with these words, O destroyer of foes, that are like acid being poured into the wounds of injured men. You break my heart, which has been pricked by those thorn-words. An ethical man, you profoundly misunderstand the unethical, for you do not praise either yourself or us, though we be praise-worthy.
>
> (7.168.14cd–16)

> Departing from his own duty (*svadharma*) and resting in the duty of a warrior, this doer of evil deeds kills us with weapons not of human origin. Calling himself a brahmin, he summoned an illusion (*māyā*) of an unendurable kind, and by an illusion has he today been killed. Arjuna, what is improper in this?
>
> (7.168.24–25)

The fight of illusion with illusion is, indeed, the leitmotif of this book, and Bhīma is correct so to redescribe the event. What remains unclear is whether it is permissible to use any illusion to fight another or whether there are limits to the morality of deceit. Bhīma's moral voice is one of social role and ethical duty, 'my station and its duties' as F. H. Bradley would put it. If Yudhiṣṭhira embodies one strand in the closely woven

ethics of the *Mahābhārata*, and Arjuna another, then Bhīma manifests yet a third, the voice of caste, hierarchy and social order.

Lacking any independent grasp of the virtues of truth, Bhīma saw no harm in lying. Arjuna understood them all and could not bring himself to lie or to condone the lie. Yudhiṣṭhira's possession of the virtues was present but shaky; his practice of truth was not properly grounded in a solid cultivation of the virtues of truth but remained at the level of a rule to be followed. Yudhiṣṭhira sees Droṇa as a force that must be stopped, even at the expense of Droṇa's own humanity. He lacked the 'reflective understanding' of the practice of truth that would have permitted him either to endorse the lie as Kṛṣṇa did or to follow Arjuna and reject it. He knew that it was good to be truthful but he had no insight into the framework of correlative virtues that go to makes sense of truthfulness as a good in itself (on this, see Appendix D). Kṛṣṇa managed to impart some of that understanding to Arjuna but had less success with Yudhiṣṭhira and, as we will see in more detail below, none at all with Bhīma. This inability to comprehend the point of a virtuous practice was the source of Yudhiṣṭhira's great moral failing, in the opinion of those who condemned him and it would in the end cost the Pāṇḍavas dear.

3.4 Vyāsa speaks out, from within

Confronted by the still more powerful illusion that is the *nārāyaṇa* weapon, the Pāṇḍava troops are in disarray. Yudhiṣṭhira himself surrenders to despair and having given the order to flee prepares to lay down his own life for Droṇa's sake, but not without first listing Droṇa's own various misdemeanours (7.170.31–6). His moral voice is hesitant to the last. Once again stepping in to repair the unjust results of Yudhiṣṭhira's weakness of will, Kṛṣṇa instructs the Pāṇḍava troops how to foil the *nārāyaṇa* weapon. If the *nārāyaṇa* is the illusion of reflection, if its violence is always reflected violence, then it is clear what should be done:

Swiftly set down your weapons and dismount from your modes of transport—this is the method of counteraction prescribed by the great soul. All of you must come down to the ground from your elephants, horses and chariots. This weapon cannot kill those who are weaponless on the ground. Wherever soldiers fight against the force of the weapon, the Kauravas become stronger. But the men who dismount

their vehicles and throw down their weapons will not be killed in battle by this weapon. Anyone who retaliates even mentally (*manasāpi*) will be killed, even if they try to hide underground.

(7.170.38–42)

Another symmetry of plot and play—the Pāṇḍavas must now disarm themselves, just as Droṇa had done earlier. And if Droṇa, having surrendered his weapons, was then unlawfully killed by the Pāṇḍavas, is it not ironic that they must now try to save themselves the same way, unsure if, defenceless, the Kauravas will slaughter them? Is this the way for them to ameliorate their sin, by assuming the guise of the victim? Kṛṣṇa's intervention once more takes the form, we must also note, of cunning non-violent activism. He again alerts the Pāṇḍavas to a non-violent resource through which they can resist the might of the weapon of mass delusion, the *nārāyaṇa*. Faced yet again with Arjuna's inclination towards pacifism, Bhīma's violent activism, and Yudhiṣṭhira's indecisive vacillation between them (a violent pacifism?), Kṛṣṇa finds the solution in a strategy of non-violent activism. Typically, the method is not to fight one illusion-weapon with another (as Bhīma recommends), nor to turn the power of the illusion-weapon against itself (that is what the *nārāyaṇa* does), but to undercut the illusion at its roots, depriving it of its power. Droṇa's energy and anger was itself the product of an illusion. If Kṛṣṇa proposed that Droṇa be tricked, the motive was not the self-interested manipulation of another human being but rather that Droṇa be reminded of his reasons for fighting and thereby freed from the illusion that was driving him. Likewise here: if one's true enemy is one's own violence and anger *reflected back*, the way to 'win' is to pacify oneself (cf. the discussion of self-control in the *Bhagavadgītā*). This, perhaps, is the deep ethical message of the episode, and reminds us of Ānandavardhana's claim that instilling the *rasa* of peace (*śānta*) is the intended function of the epic as a whole.

Does the trick work? Only Bhīma refuses to lay down his weaponry, and has to be dragged by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna out of the cloak of flames that envelops and permeates him. Duryodhana calls upon Aśvatthāman to redeploy the *nārāyaṇa*, but Aśvatthāman explains that:

That weapon, O king, will not return, nor can it be used a second time. If made to return, it will without doubt kill the one who uses it.

(7.171.27)

The *nārāyaṇa* is a weapon of inversion and the inversion of an inverse equals the original. Instead, in a theatrical scene of mock combat, Aśvatthāman fights Dhṛṣṭadyumna. They pierce each other with hundreds of arrows, without, it would appear, doing any *real* damage. Aśvatthāman now strikes out at the other Pāṇḍavas, hitting Arjuna with six arrows, Kṛṣṇa with six, Bhīma with five. Then it is the turn of Bhīma and Aśvatthāman to envelop each other in clouds of arrows. Bhīma comes off worse, is rendered unconscious, and gets carried off the battlefield in his chariot. Seeing Bhīma defeated, the Pāṇḍava forces panic and disperse, while Aśvatthāman causes general carnage.

The scene is set for the final battle. Only now does Arjuna, the most accomplished fighter on the Pāṇḍava side, enter the fray. He is angry and he speaks to Aśvatthāman in provocative and unmeasured terms, the like of which he has not spoken before, terms, the narrator explains, unworthy and unbecoming of him (7.172.1–13). Aśvatthāman is infuriated and invokes another magical weapon, the *āgneya*, an unprecedented weapon of searing heat that sends the very cosmos into a fever and makes even the sun turn away. Darkness envelops the world and engulfs the Pāṇḍava forces and even Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are thought to be dead. Now, however, Arjuna summons into existence the only antidote to the *āgneya*, and indeed to every other weapon—a weapon called *brāhma*. Aśvatthāman, despondent, as baffled as his weapon, departs the fight. His parting remark reveals the cause of his despair: he says 'all this is false!' (*sarvam idaṃ mithyā*, 7.172.42cd). Just as the power of his weaponry has been exposed as an illusion, so too has his belief in the rightness of his actions. It is all a mirage, moral substance as ephemeral as military substance. Nothing one believes to be true and real is incapable of being shown, at the next moment, to be untrue and unreal. Is everything, then, just an illusion? Who better to answer that question than the story's narrator, Vyāsa himself, and with elegant poetic justice, it is none other than Vyāsa whom Aśvatthāman just happens to run into on the road (7.172.43). Beholding him he asks:

> "Oh sir! Oh sir! An illusion (*māyā*) or an act of chance—I do not know what this must be. In what way is this weapon false (*mithyā*)? Where have I transgressed? (7.172.45–6)... Why were Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, both bearing the traits of human beings, not killed? Thus I inquire, dear sir; please answer truthfully (*yathātatham*).
>
> (7.172.49)

Vyāsa now lets Aśvatthāman into a most remarkable secret. There was once an ascetic of exceptional prowess called Nārāyaṇa, whose great austerity freed his mind from worldly attachment and led him to behold the creator and guardian of the universe:

> He then beheld Rudra, the master, origin and guardian of the universe, the lord of all the gods, the supreme deity, who is exceedingly hard to see, who is smaller than the smallest and larger than the largest.
>
> (7.172.55–57a)

Nārāyaṇa's Upaniṣadic austerity and devotion is repaid: Rudra grants him a number of boons, the most significant one of which is that:

> You will be stronger than me if ever we were to enter into battle.
>
> (7.172.78cd)

Nārāyaṇa's great asceticism has another consequence: a sage called Nara, the equal of Nārāyaṇa himself, is born from it.

Vyāsa now decodes the story of the *Mahābhārata*, dispelling the allegorical illusion. Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa, 'this god who moves about, confusing the world with his illusions' (7.172.79cd). Arjuna is Nara, the very equal of Kṛṣṇa (7.172.80). Vyāsa tells Aśvatthāman that he too, in earlier lives, was adored by the gods and was as pious and ascetic as Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna themselves. Aśvatthāman, we are told, now understood; revering Kṛṣṇa, he calls an end to the war. Thus ends five days of immense carnage and Droṇa repairs to heaven.

Why then did Aśvatthāman's weapon fail? We are not told explicitly, but can easily surmise. In the great homology between battlefield and cosmos, Aśvatthāman is Rudra's stand-in, and is fighting against a weapon he himself has made more powerful than himself. For he has given to Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa, who stand for Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the greatest weapon of all, namely, the power to break illusions. They alone are able to dismantle the framework of false illusions, the lies, the deceits; not indeed because they 'always tell the truth' but because they know how to deconstruct deceit from within, undercutting the energy that sustains its violent power. Vyāsa too, entering the story he himself has told, shows us, the readers, how to dismantle it, how to extract ourselves from the illusion he creates. For indeed the whole battle and everything in it is an illusion, a mirror image of the cosmos and an allegory for moral elusiveness in real life. That is how Vyāsa explains the meaning of the battle to Aśvatthāman.

By this time, Vyāsa has strolled over to the other side of the battlefield and Arjuna confesses to him that he has had the most remarkable vision. In the midst of battle, Arjuna says, he seemed to see before him a person burning like fire, a person who killed the enemy before Arjuna had time to; indeed:

The people thought that I had cut down the enemy, but they were [in fact] cut down by him. Following behind, I [merely] destroyed again those troops [already] destroyed by him.

(7.173.7)

In what has become a familiar trope, Arjuna's apparent killings turn out, after all, to be only illusions, the fact of their being illusions being concealed by still another illusion. The presence of the illusion is itself concealed. Vyāsa explains that the person whom Arjuna saw was none other than the great lord Rudra. Rudra is the soul of the universe and the doer of all deeds in the universe (7.173.68). Indeed:

The disciplines dealing with the soul—the branches of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads, the Purāṇas—that great lord is what is most fully concealed there.

(After 7.173.69 in mss. N (Northern Recension); see 1466*, p. 1051)

When Vyāsa explains the meaning of the battle to Arjuna, it is through a ritual cosmological homology. Rudra, we are told, fashioned the very cosmos in the shape of a chariot ready for battle:

And Śiva, having made the two mountains, Gandhamādana and Vindhya, the two bamboo poles; and the earth with her oceans and forests, the chariot; and Śeṣa, the lord of snakes, the axle; and that lord of lords having made the sun and moon the two wheels; and his two attendants, Elapatra and Puṣpadanta, the two linchpins; and the mountain Malaya the yoke, and the architect of the gods, Takṣaka, the bindings; and the valiant Śiva made the four ropes to tie the horses; and having made the four Vedas the four horses; and the auxiliary Vedas the bridle-bits; and the *gāyatrī* and the *sāvitrī* hymns the reins; and the syllable *om* the whip, and brahman the charioteer; and having made the mountain Mandara the bow, and Vāsuki, the king of snakes, the string; and Viṣṇu the finest arrow-shaft and Agni the arrow-head; and the wind the two tails with feathers, and a bolt of lightning the sword; and mount Meru the standard shaft; he, Śiva, then rode upon that divine chariot made out of all the gods.

(After 7.173.56ab in mss. N (Northern Recension); Appendix I, no. 25, pp. 1141–2)

If Arjuna's moral inclination throughout the epic has been towards pacifism, this now receives justification in the idea that the whole course of battle is bound into an isomorphism with the evolution of the cosmos. Arjuna and Aśvatthāman are given different explanations by Vyāsa, but in each case the explanation serves to rationalize the battle, to unravel its significance and render intelligible the actions of the individual participants. To borrow another helpful phrase of F. H. Bradley, Vyāsa 'sees from the centre'.[11] Although embedded within the plot, his perception is from no participant's point of view.

One thing, by now, should be amply clear. This was no simple battle of good over evil, with gods on one side and evil doers on the other. In the end, it looks much more as if the two sides in the battle were not fighting against each other at all but rather together battling in different ways against a common enemy. That enemy was illusion in all its manifold forms. And the most pernicious form of all is the concealment of the self from itself, for that leads to desire, and desire leads to anger, and someone who acts with anger in their soul is ensnared all the more in an illusion of their own making. If one's worst enemy is one's own anger reflected back, pacifying oneself is the only way to win.

3.5 Cladding a lie with the truth: Yudhiṣṭhira's casuistry

Yudhiṣṭhira deceived Droṇa but claimed that he did not lie. In resorting to a linguistic manoeuvre, Yudhiṣṭhira placed himself in the unlikely company of the Catholic casuists of sixteenth-century England. According to these casuists, while it was always wrong to tell a lie, there are circumstances in which it is not wrong to deceive with words. Forced to speak under conditions of persecution, when the usual tactics for deflecting the overly inquisitive, like remaining silent or answering a question with a question, were not available (see §2.4 above), they took their lead from St Thomas Aquinas' remark that 'since lies as such are out of order, they cannot be used to rescue others whatever the peril; rather the truth must be cleverly masked

[11] F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 172.

in some way (*licet tamen veritatem occultare sub aliqua dissimulatione*)'.[12] One of the methods they found to mask the truth was a doctrine of equivocation: the statement one makes has two meanings, one true and the other false. The intention is that one's audience will take the statement as expressing the false meaning and so be misled; but one will not have lied because it is the true meaning that is the one actually stated. Another technique was the notorious doctrine of mental restriction: one said something that was only true in a restricted sense, but one asserted the restriction only in one's mind (or before God). A certain Father Ward, for example, swore that he was not a priest, explaining later that what he had said was true because, in his mind, he had meant a priest of Apollo at Delphi.[13] If to lie, that is to say something one believes to be false with the intention to deceive, is never morally permitted, but the prohibition does not attach to deception per se, then these are the ways one might try to assert what one believes to be true, but mask that truth beneath a deception.

An acknowledgement that speaking truthfully is among the principal virtues is already to be found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad:

> When a man is hungry, thirsty, and without pleasures—that is his sacrificial consecration; and when he eats, drinks, and enjoys pleasures—by that he performs the preparatory rites; when he laughs, feasts, and has sex—by that he sings the chants and performs the recitations; austerity (*tapas*), generosity (*dāna*), integrity (*ārjava*), non-injury (*ahiṃsā*), and truthfulness (*satyavacana*)—these are his sacrificial gifts.
>
> (CU 13.7.1–4)

Truthfulness is situated here within a framework of co-dependent virtues, themselves related to a conception of human flourishing through a ritual homology. The passage raises the question of the relationship between truthfulness and other supporting or commensurable virtues (on which, see further Appendix D), and with that the possibility that truthfulness might come into conflict with other virtues of equal centrality. The idea that one only injures oneself by lying is hinted at in the Praśna Upaniṣad:

[12] Cited in Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 197.

[13] Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, p. 205. Not every case of mental restriction is as extreme as this one.

Then Sukeśa Bharadvāja asked him: 'Hiraṇyanābha, a prince of Kosala, once came to me, Lord, and asked this question: 'Do you know the person consisting of sixteen parts?' I told the prince: 'I don't know him. If I had known him, how could I have not told you. Up to his very roots, surely, a man withers when he tells a lie (*anṛta*). That's why I can't tell you a lie.' He got on to his chariot silently and went away. So I ask you: who is that person?

(PU 6.1)

This might remind one of *Psalms* 1.11: 'The mouth that lies shall kill the soul.' In spite of these Upaniṣadic endorsements of truth-telling, we will see that in the *Dharmaśāstra* several kinds of situation were normally regarded as rendering a lie morally permissible (see §3.6 below). We have indeed already seen that Kṛṣṇa's advice was that someone simply lie to Droṇa: if a deception is warranted, then so is a lie. Bernard Williams has criticized a morality based on what he has called the 'fetishization of assertion'. Suppose we agree that there are reasons not to tell the truth to people who have no right to it; Williams says that 'someone who is sympathetic to that idea is likely to take its force to be that in extreme cases, at least, … you can tell a lie to wrongful questioners. That is the conclusion that this consideration leads us to, not to a desperately shifty attempt to rearrange the boundaries of what counts as a lie.'[14]

If one takes the view that Kṛṣṇa and Bernard Williams share, then there is simply no need for those linguistic manoeuvres whose purpose is to give the truth a protective cover. Yudhiṣṭhira's refusal ever to tell a lie was not, however, the result of any such fetish; on the contrary, it was part of his own particular moral duty (*svadharma*), and not part of the moral law obligatory for all (*sanātana-dharma*). It is the fact that it is wrong for *him* to lie, though not wrong for others, that makes it necessary for him to resort to casuistry, given that he accepts Kṛṣṇa's argument that some form of deceit was morally justified and pragmatically necessary in the particular circumstances they find themselves in. That a particular course of action can be a duty for one person but not for another, even in exactly the same circumstances, seems to have been the view Cicero took about Cato's suicide: 'Everybody, however, must hold fast to what is peculiarly his … Indeed, such diversity of natures carries with it so great significance that suicide may be for one

[14] Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 105. The whole of section 5.5 is very relevant to our discussion.

person a duty, for another in the same circumstances not his duty' (*De Officiis* I. 110, 112).[15] The example of Yudhiṣṭhira reveals an important strain of moral particularism in the Indian epics.

Let us think more carefully than we have done so far about the peculiar form Yudhiṣṭhira's cloaking of the truth took. As we have seen, Yudhiṣṭhira's utterance is reported as follows:

> Sinking in fear of untruth but addicted to the victory, Yudhiṣṭhira, equivocating, spoke out of turn and said, 'Lord, [he] is slain, the elephant (*kuñjara*)' (*avaktavyam abravid rājan hataḥ kuñjara ity uta*).
>
> (7.164.106cd)

Notice, first of all, that in the speech report, the name 'Aśvatthāman' is not itself used. One possibility is that the reader is meant to provide it, the actual words uttered by Yudhiṣṭhira being 'Aśvatthāman is slain', with 'the elephant' added in murmured apposition.[16] There are two problems with that understanding, however, one textual and the other philosophical. The textual problem is that on this construal, Yudhiṣṭhira simply repeats the very trick Bhīma had already attempted on Droṇa. Perhaps it could work the second time round because Droṇa trusts Yudhiṣṭhira more than he does Bhīma, but it nevertheless seems too cheap a trick for Yudhiṣṭhira to play. Its crudity is appropriate for Bhīma but not for Yudhiṣṭhira. The philosophical problem is that it is far from clear that this trick does indeed preserve Yudhiṣṭhira's truthfulness. It seems to be a combination of the two casuistic techniques we identified, equivocation and mental restriction. The worry about equivocation, used alone, is that it is less than clear which of the two meanings *is* the one actually asserted. Disambiguation, in Indian semantic theory at least, is regarded as a matter of the speaker's intentions (*tātparya*). The problem here is that Yudhiṣṭhira has two intentions: one is to get the audience, here Droṇa, to think that he is speaking about Droṇa's son; the other is to assert something he himself believes to be true. Surely, if the audience takes an ambiguous statement in one, rather than the other, meaning, and if, moreover, the speaker intended that the audience take it in this rather than that sense, then this is what has been *asserted* in making the

[15] I owe this information to Richard Sorabji.

[16] Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Ritual of Battle: Kṛṣṇa in the Mahābhārata* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. 251, n. 16; agreeing with Ganguli-Roy, who translates the sentence: 'Yudhiṣṭhira distinctly said that Aśvatthāman was dead, adding indistinctly the world "elephant".'

statement. If that is right, then an assertion, 'Aśvatthāman is slain', whether by Bhīma or by Yudhiṣṭhira, simply states that Droṇa's son has been slain. It is a straightforward lie, and not a covered up truth. Perhaps that is the reason for the second element, a sort of mental restriction, which has Yudhiṣṭhira add indistinctly 'the elephant'. Now his actual words are true, for he himself has disambiguated the proper name by placing it in apposition with a descriptive noun. The locus of the deception has shifted from the speaker's intentions (*tātparya*) to the physical constitution (*āsatti*) of the utterance, Yudhiṣṭhira speaking in a voice calculated not to carry. This still requires, however, that we supply the name 'Aśvatthāman' to the speech report, for otherwise Yudhiṣṭhira would have succeeded only in mumbling.

I would like to explore a different possibility. The word *kuñjara*, in addition to its common meaning of 'elephant', is also synonymous with one of the names for the fig tree: *aśvattha*. So another possibility is that Yudhiṣṭhira did say, exactly as reported, '*kuñjara* is slain', hoping that Droṇa would think that he is using an affectionate or playful form of words to refer to Droṇa's son, Aśvatthāman. It would be as if I were to say 'The cherub's not here', hoping that my audience will take me to be talking about someone whose name is 'Angela' (and who is here), but pretending to myself that my statement is not a lie because all the real cherubs are elsewhere. On this interpretation, Yudhiṣṭhira wants it to be the case that what he actually says is that the elephant is slain, something that is true. He wants Droṇa to think that he has referred to Aśvatthāman using a word that is synonymous with one that sounds like the name of Droṇa's son. This second possibility would have the advantage of distancing him from Bhīma's much cruder deception. Yudhiṣṭhira's utterance now resembles the words of an oracle in the way they leave the final responsibility for their interpretation with the listener. Yudhiṣṭhira intends Droṇa to think that he is engaging in a rather subtle wordplay. Droṇa has asked him whether Aśvatthāman is dead and it is well within the pragmatic rules of ordinary conversation that he reply, not repeating Aśvatthāman's name, but by finding an oblique way of signifying him. The utterance is still deceitful, but it is much less clear that it is also untrue; the deceit rests instead in the surreptitious use of conversational implicature.[17] One of

[17] H. P. Grice, 'Logic and conversation', in Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41–58.

the rules on normal conversation is that one makes one's contribution to the conversation fit what is required (and perhaps we can include that notion of what is 'fitting' within the Indian concept of *yogyatā*, another of the four necessary conditions for testimony). Clearly, it would have been very odd for Yudhiṣṭhira to start talking about an elephant in response to Droṇa's question; the rules governing ordinary conversation generate an expectation that his reply 'fits' the question and the effect of those expectations here is that his audience look for a play on words rather than read off the literal meaning directly. This form of casuistry, much subtler than mental restriction or simple equivocation, widens the gap between lying and deceit, and covers the truth in a very fine cloak.

If it is indeed Yudhiṣṭhira's particular duty (*svadharma*) to speak only the truth, and it is also a demand, on broader moral grounds, that he deceive Droṇa, then the device he finds brilliantly and simultaneously discharges two apparently conflicting moral duties. It can hardly be Yudhiṣṭhira's fault if others see the matter differently. What the assessment of the event now comes down to is this: did Droṇa have a right to a truthful answer? Was he a persecutory inquisitor, or simply a father worried about his son? Yudhiṣṭhira's sin, if indeed there was one, is not that he entered into an act of deception per se, but that he deceived someone who had done nothing to forfeit his right to the truth.

Sense could now be made of the puzzling intervention by the great sages of the past who suddenly appear and inveigh Droṇa to desist. The cumulative effect is to reinforce in Droṇa's mind the necessity of *demanding* the information from Yudhiṣṭhira. The question is no longer whether to manipulate Droṇa by feeding him lies, but rather the issue is whether Droṇa has a right to the truth he demands. The ethics of concealment have replaced the ethics of manipulation and we have entered the territory of the honest lie.

Is an attempt to classify Droṇa with the unjust inquisitor successful? One reason to think that he does not, after all, have a right to the truth about his son from Yudhiṣṭhira is that he is 'trading upon' Yudhiṣṭhira's virtue, exploiting his reputation for truthfulness for his own ends and surely virtue is not so easily abused. Droṇa, we might say, is trying to be a 'free-rider' on Yudhiṣṭhira's goodness. Yudhiṣṭhira simply beats him at his own game (for, as Bhīṣma remarks at 12.110.26, 'One who uses illusion (*māyā*) should be met with illusion; one who is good should be answered with goodness').

That is, indeed, one great lesson of the *Droṇaparvan*—the need to fight illusion with illusion, the requirement not to play straight against a crooked opponent. In that sense, Kṛṣṇa is right; but Arjuna is right too in his moral assessment, for when one plays dirty against the dirty, there is no hope of emerging with one's honour, dignity and self-respect intact. Arjuna is right that the Pāṇḍava warriors can feel only regret for what they have done but wrong to imagine that choosing the beggar's life would be, ethically, better (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.2). If Yudhiṣṭhira was later to feel regret for what he had done, perhaps it was the kind of regret any ethically sensitive person would feel when they have had to deceive another human being for the sake of a greater good, rather than the kind of regret that is mixed with shame, when one regrets doing something one knows one should not have.[18]

Our good poet Vyāsa naturally cannot leave it at that. Yudhiṣṭhira, we are reminded, was 'desirous of victory', and if that was his real motive, then the lie was simply pernicious. True to form, Vyāsa again muddies the dark waters of moral reflection. At the very end of the *Mahābhārata*, indeed, Yudhiṣṭhira is made to see a vision of his brothers suffering in hell for their sins but is then informed that this vision is itself nothing but an illusion: 'You once deceived Droṇa about his son, and have therefore, by means of an act of deception, been given a vision of hell' (18.3.14; Northern Recension). This vision is meant to purge Yudhiṣṭhira of the fever in his heart, divesting him of enmity and grief. And with that the labyrinth of deceptions is brought to an end, in a final recognition of human moral frailty: 'The illusions have ended. There is some good and some bad in all things.'

3.6 On lying: advice in the Dharmaśāstra and Śāntiparvan

In the Hindu epic and religious literature, a general endorsement of the virtue of truthfulness is balanced against a recognition that there can be circumstances in which it is permissible and even obligatory to lie. Lies have two functions: to *mask* and to *manipulate*. To lie is to assert as true what

[18] On the importance of this distinction: Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

one thinks to be false, and in lying one conceals a central part of oneself, the part made out of belief, intention and will. 'There be three degrees, of this Hiding, and Vailing of a Mans Selfe,' said Francis Bacon: *secrecy*, 'when a man leaveth himselfe without Observation, or without Hold to be taken, what he is'; *dissimulation*, 'when a man lets fall Signs and Arguments, that he is not what he is'; and *simulation*, 'when a Man industriously, and expressely, faigns, and pretends to be what he is not'.[19] Bacon is not the first to observe that it is sometimes right to conceal oneself from others, for not everyone has a right to the truth and even those who do can forfeit it. If one cannot maintain an 'absurd silence' in the face of the unfairly inquisitive or interrogative, the great advantage of the lie is 'to reserve to a Mans Selfe, a faire Retreat'.

To lie, to speak falsely as if in truth, is, however, also to corrupt the listener's relationship with the world, at least if the lie is believed. In lying, I make your world a world of *my* invention. If any statement is in general the gift of a truth, the lie is false gift. The lie serves as the vehicle for epistemic manipulation, often for reasons of personal gain. It is a free ride on the relations of trust that must exist in any community. To mask and to manipulate, then, are the twin, if separable, uses of a lie, the distinction following from the fact that an assertion '*p*' simultaneously communicates two things: that *p*, and that the one making the assertion believes that *p*.[20] That it is right, occasionally, to conceal oneself from others is, we have suggested, a reasonable view. But is it ever right deliberately to distort another person's conceptual scheme, their 'world', to enmesh them within an illusion of one's own making?

Indian thinkers do not regard it as obligatory to tell the truth when there is a question of self-preservation from physical harm or of preventing harm being done to others. Manu (*c.* second–third centuries CE) succinctly brings out the logical relationship in such cases of conflicting obligation:

[19] Francis Bacon, 'Of simulation', in *Essayes or Councels, Civill and Morall* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1897), pp. 18–20.

[20] On the norms governing assertion: Timothy Williamson, 'Knowing and asserting', *Philosophical Review* 105 (1996): 489–523; Bernard Williams, *Truth & Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Williams takes issue with Williamson's claim that asserting *p* is governed by the norm that the assertor knows *p*. That dispute does not affect what I am saying here.

He should say what is true, and he should say what is pleasant; he should not say what is true but unpleasant, and he should not say what is pleasant but untrue—that is the eternal Law.

(Manu 4.138)

Manu's clever formula provides obligation with a Boolean logic. One's obligation is to the conjunctive satisfaction of all the virtues (if we take 'what is pleasant' (*priya*) here to include the virtues other than truthfulness). One is obliged not to satisfy one without the other, or to satisfy neither.[21] So in a situation where the only choice is between speaking truly but unpleasantly and speaking untruly but pleasantly (the so-called 'paternalistic' deceit), an appeal to one's 'constant duty' will have nothing to say that might guide one's action. Yudhiṣṭhira found himself in exactly such a situation, having to choose between a truth that would lose the battle finally for the Pāṇḍavas and a lie that would decisively win it. Arjuna recommended the first course of action, Kṛṣṇa the second, and Bhīma a conspicuously casuistic fudge. The problem with the casuistic resolution is that it is hard to see how there can be any moral difference between deception by means of assertion, that is, lying, and deception by means of conversational implicature; and if that is right, then, ironically, it is more *honest* simply to lie. That is, of course, exactly Kṛṣṇa's point. Kṛṣṇa's recommendation of a straightforward lie in an exceptional circumstance turns out, in fact, to be more squarely within the prevailing moral framework than Yudhiṣṭhira's austere conception of what it is to follow a moral rule.

In the twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Śāntiparvan,* a very old Bhīṣma is on his death-bed and at Yudhiṣṭhira's request enters into a lengthy moral discourse. If Yudhiṣṭhira's deeds and misdeeds in the course of the battle are not explicitly referred to, this is nevertheless the place where a moral assessment of them is attempted.[22] Of particular significance, then, are the sections where Bhīṣma discusses the moral status of truth and truthfulness (12.110, 12.140 and 12.156—the last of which I discuss

[21] Thus 8.274: 'If a man calls someone "one-eyed," "lame," or some other similar name, he should be fined at least one Kārṣāpaṇa, even if what he says is true.'

[22] *The Mahābhārata*, critically edited by Vishnu S. Sukthankar and S. K. Belvalkar (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute,1950), vols 12, 13, fasc. 20, 21: *Śāntiparvan: āpaddharma.*

separately in Appendix D). Bhīṣma stresses more than once that it is not always immoral to lie, and that one has to use one's reason and intelligence in each particular case to discriminate between the moral and the immoral:

> Therefore, O Son-of-Kuntī, one who is wise and self-restrained should live in this world using his intellect (*buddhi*) in the discrimination of the moral and the immoral (*dharmādharmaniścaya*).
>
> (12.139.94)

We have just been told the story of a brahmin Viśvāmitra who chooses to eat dog-meat rather than to starve, the moral being that the preservation of one's own life justifies erstwhile violations of religious duty. Yudhiṣṭhira's response is extremely telling: he says that if an act so detestable that it resembles a lie is permissible, then moral duty (*dharma*) itself is made loose, and there is no act from which one should desist (12.140.1). In raising the spectre of moral chaos, Yudhiṣṭhira reveals the fear that motivates the inflexible rule-follower. Unable to trust his judgement, he prefers instead a blind allegiance to the moral law. Bhīṣma proceeds to give Yudhiṣṭhira a sharp lesson in the necessity for kings to have sound practical reason! A king should not depend on a morality derived from one faction alone but must use his intellect (*buddhi*) to draw wisdom from a variety of sources and examples. The moral sometimes assumes the outward form of the immoral and the sin involved in killing one who ought not to have been killed is on a par with the sin of not killing someone who ought to be killed (i.e. one cannot simply follow the rule 'do not kill') (12.140.26ab). Yudhiṣṭhira then asks Bhīṣma if there is any rule at all which permits of no exception, to which Bhīṣma responds that the only rule is to worship learned and pious brahmins as if they are gods. A cruel turn! Up to this point, Yudhiṣṭhira might have hoped to find some comfort in Bhīṣma's words for his decision to deceive Droṇa, but now it is as if Bhīṣma plays a trick on him. The rule-follower's desperate need is for a rule to follow—then let it be 'don't kill revered brahmins' rather than 'don't tell lies'. Yudhiṣṭhira's rule-following morality leads down a blind alley.

How then ought moral reason guide one when what is at stake is whether to tell the truth or a lie? The *Mahābhārata* sometimes repeats verses from the *Dharmaśāstra* that give a list of exemptions to the general prohibition on lying (e.g. after 7.164.99 in some mss.; 8.69.30; 12.110.18ab; etc.).

Typically, five exemptions are noted, although the various lists are not absolutely consistent:[23]

A man may tell a lie at a marriage; during a sexual encounter; when his life is at stake; when there is a risk of losing all his property; and for the sake of a Brahmin. These five types of lies, they say, do not entail loss of caste.

(Vasiṣṭha 16.36)

According to some, telling a lie at a marriage, during sex, in jest, or in grief is not a sin, but not if it concerns an elder, because when a man tells a lie with regard to an elder even in his mind and even with respect to something trivial, he brings ruin upon himself and upon seven generations before him and after him.

(Gautama 23.29–31)[24]

When telling the truth will result in the execution of a Śūdra, Vaiśya, Kṣatriya or Brahmin, one may tell a lie, for that is better than the truth.

(Manu 8.104)

Apparently, then, it is the generally accepted norm that a lie carries no moral sanction when it falls into one or more of the above categories: marital, amorous, jocose, protective, dutiful. A pernicious lie, in contrast, is a lie that benefits the liar and harms someone else. The compassionate lie, we might observe—lying to someone for their own good—isn't obviously included in any item on this list.

On what grounds can we decide whether Yudhiṣṭhira was, after all, displaying a virtuous disposition, the disposition to trustworthiness in speech, where that denotes a reliability to say the 'right' thing, the thing the particular circumstance calls to be said? In another section of the *Śāntiparvan*, this question is addressed head on. Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma our question, and coming from his lips the question has an unmistakable poignancy:

Yudhiṣṭhira said—Bhārata, how does one live who desires to reside in morality (*dharma*)? Wise bull of Bharata, do reply to this inquiry! Concealing the world, truth (*satya*) and falsity (*anṛta*) occur together. Of these two, O King, which should one practice who is settled on morality? What is truth? What is falsity? And what is

[23] Patrick Olivelle, *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha, An Annotated Text and Translation* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000).

[24] In an intriguing example of backwards causation, made still more puzzling by the fact that seven generations of *elders* receive punishment for lying to an *elder*!

the morality constant for all (*sanātana*)? At which times ought one speak the truth, and at which times ought one to speak falsely?

Bhīṣma said—Speaking the truth is a good (*sādhu*), and there is nothing higher than truth. I will tell you, Bhārata, something that is very difficult in the common world to understand. When the truth would be false, and also when the false would be true, one should not speak truly; one should speak falsely. For this reason, a fool is in a state of confusion when not resting on the truth. Discriminating between truth and falsity, then, is the one who understands morality.

A person might obtain great merit though he be ignoble, stupid and cruel; as for instance Valāka, who slew the blind monster [by mistake—he was simply out to kill]. How extraordinary that a fool, desiring to be moral without understanding morality, might obtain to great sin; [yet another] instance is the owl on the bank of the Gaṅgā. Your question here is similar: it is extremely hard to say what is moral. Although very hard to find a reply, this will be attempted now by means of the use of reason (*tarka*). Morality (*dharma*) has been described as for the sake of the glory or dignity (*prabhāva*) of creatures, from which [definition] morality is determined to consist in non-violence (*ahiṃsā*). Morality is, it is also said, that which upholds and maintains (*dhāraṇā*), creatures being supported by morality. From that [definition], morality is determined to consist in maintenance. Some people say that morality has its basis in the scriptures, but other people deny this. We do not condemn them, for not all morality is based in scriptural prescription.

One ought never speak with those who, wanting another's money, seek to please. This is certainly the right thing to do. If one is able to get free by remaining silent, one should not make a sound. If one has to speak, or if not to speak would invite distrust, then it is better to speak falsely than the truth—this is the considered opinion.

(12.110.1–15ab)

The last of these points reminds us of Bacon's observation that if one cannot maintain an 'absurd silence' under hostile questions, the lie is permitted 'to reserve to a Mans Selfe, a faire Retreat'. Bhīṣma displays greater sensitivity to what B.K. Matilal[25] has aptly termed the 'elusiveness' and 'ambiguity' of *dharma* than is always apparent in *dharmaśāstra* writers like Manu. Manu says categorically 'and truth is better than ascetic silence' (Manu 2.83), a sentiment we have seen resisted by both Cicero and the

[25] B. K. Matilal, 'Elusiveness and ambiguity in dharma-ethics', in his *Epics and Ethics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press 2002), pp. 36–48.

Buddha. Sometimes it is wrong to tell the truth; sometimes, indeed, it is right to lie. When? Bhīṣma's answer is clear—when one conceals the truth from a person who has no *right to the truth*. To give somebody something of value (wealth, knowledge) to which they have no rightful entitlement is not to display any virtue. A person of sound moral reason is able to discriminate and decide for themselves in each particular case whether the person who makes a demand has a right to what is being demanded, the basis for that judgement involving an assessment of the person's reasons for wanting it.

One might indeed incur a great moral wrong in blindly following some such moral precept as 'Always speak the truth'. In the *Mahābhārata*, this is illustrated through the story of the ascetic Kauśika who, having taken a vow always to speak the truth, revealed to a band of robbers the whereabouts of some people they were pursuing. The robbers thereby found their victims and killed them. Kauśika, described as ignorant of the subtleties of morality, is summarily condemned to hell (MB 8.69.40–46).[26] For, as John Newman said so well, 'vows are the wise defence of unstable virtue, and general rules the refuge of feeble authority.'[27] Bhīṣma's argument defends lies of concealment, when the person from whom one is concealing the truth does not have a right to the truth. On the other hand, his argument gives no succour to pernicious lies, lies that manipulate or otherwise harm others, usually for one's own gain. Bhīṣma is here, we may note, in full accord with Kṛṣṇa; indeed, the passage quoted above is repeated more or less verbatim from another book of the *Mahābhārata*, but there put in Kṛṣṇa's voice (MB 8.69.21–55).

[26] The same example was known to Augustine, who nevertheless defends unconditional truth-telling: Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, *De Mendacio*, in *Treatises on Various Subjects*, trans. Mary Sarah Muldowney et al. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1952), vol. 14, §4. When French philosopher Benjamin Constant, to the great annoyance of Immanuel Kant, stated that 'to tell the truth is a duty, but only to one who has a right to the truth. But no one has a right to a truth that harms others,' Kant offered a strange defence of those who act as did Kauśika: 'If you have by a lie prevented someone just now bent on murder from committing the deed, then you are legally accountable for all the consequences that might arise from it. But if you have kept strictly to the truth, then public justice can hold nothing against you, whatever the unforeseen consequences might be.' Immanuel Kant, 'On a supposed right to lie from philanthropy', in Mary J. Gregory (trans. and ed.), *Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 611–15.

[27] J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845; reprinted London: Longmans Green, 1890), pp. 188–9. I discuss Newman's important ideas about the nature of dynamic moral traditions in my contribution to Federico Squarcini (ed.), *Boundaries, Dynamics and Construction of Traditions in South Asia* (Florence: Florence University Press, 2006).

What, finally, should we make of that pivotal event in the *Mahābhārata*, Yudhiṣṭhira's lie, that brought the downfall of Droṇa, giving victory to the Pāṇḍavas but seemingly tarnishing them in *adharma*, immoral conduct? Was this a development of the tradition of truthfulness, a sign of its health and flexibility? Or was it a corruption, an indication that the tradition was in decay? If virtues have histories, can we then speak of these events as a form of moral progress, meaning by that phrase that the conception of what the virtue of truthfulness consists in has undergone a development? B. K. Matilal has argued that Kṛṣṇa's role in this incident is as a sort of moral expert, someone who is able to bring about a paradigm shift in the conception of *dharma*:

> Sometimes it is possible for a leader to transcend or breach the rigid code of conduct valued in the society, with the sole idea of creating a new paradigm that will also be acknowledged and esteemed within that order. Our Kṛṣṇa might be looked upon as a leader of that sort. It may be that he created new paradigms to show the limitations of such a generally accepted moral codes of truth-telling and promise-keeping.[28]

Kṛṣṇa, the moral expert, brings about a dramatic change in the tradition but one that is 'acknowledged and esteemed' by that tradition itself; or, in other words, capable of being rendered intelligible according to the internal critical principles of the tradition as progressive, a change in the direction of a perfection of the inner principle of the tradition. The idea that morality has a history is a difficult one. In our analysis of truthfulness in the Indian tradition, however, we have seen how there is a progression and a development in the virtue of sincerity. Kṛṣṇa's role is that of a 'moral expert' who recommends that the tradition change: the underlying idea of sincerity as a matter of not harming others in speech is better fulfilled in a complex disposition not to undermine their relationship with the truth than in an adherence to any simple rule on lying. This change is a genuine development, and not a corruption, of the tradition, to the extent that it brings out in a richer form the underlying principle of the tradition, in such a way that other participants to that tradition can make sense of it, or 'acknowledge' it, as such. The extent to which they are able to do so is what the complex moral deliberation in the *Mahābhārata*, given voice in

[28] B. K. Matilal, 'In defence of a devious divinity', in *Epics and Ethics,* p. 105.

its respective players, seeks to establish. In the *Mahābhārata* we see directly a dynamic moral tradition employing its immersed critical principles in a process of genuine development.

This brings Part I of my book to an end. I have argued that three of India's greatest textual resources—the Upaniṣads, the Nikāya and the Mahābhārata—share at least one thing: none of these texts merely puts the truth 'on display'. Each one, in its way, insists that discovering the truth, and in so doing freeing oneself of the deep errors in one's thinking about self, is something the reader must do for themselves; this, whether the trope employed be reluctance, silence-and-simile or the clash of 'disturbing opposites'. In Part II, I will describe how later philosophers in the Indian tradition dealt with this attribute of texts from which they nevertheless wanted to extract the truth. How can a text whose primary function is therapy of the soul be made to reveal a substantive view about the nature of self?

PART II

Exhortations to Enlightenment

4

Words That Burn: Why Did the Buddha Say What He Did?

> Before all else, that the soul be turned around as regards the fundamental direction of its striving…
>
> Martin Heidegger[1]

It is time to reconsider the early texts, adopting now a point of view that lies outside them. What is the audience to do with these texts, and what do the texts seek to do with their audience? I want to develop in this and the next chapter the answer that has already been suggested, that such texts aim to 'turn around' the audience, to effect in them a transformation of self-conception. To make sense of this, we will need to distinguish between the text as *vehicle* for self-transformation, and the text as bearer of declarative *content*. My interest in the next two chapters lies in the relationship between these mutually dependent functions of a text. How does a text facilitate in its reader that transformation as a result of which the reader is brought into accord with the declared content the text announces? The Buddhist Āryadeva supplies one answer: texts 'burn up' whichever false views happen to be entertained in the audience's minds. Advaitic authors like Maṇḍanamiśra offer an alternative: texts are the fulcrum with the help of which one levers oneself up into the truth. The Nikāya and the Upaniṣads are 'Trojan' texts; their surface form a vehicle that gains them entry into the mind of their audiences (that idea being one that has already been analysed, within the tradition itself, in the context of Yudhiṣṭhira's 'lie'). Once in, they *self-detonate*: that is to say, they detonate the self of the

[1] Heidegger is referring to Plato's allegory of the cave; 'Plato's doctrine of truth', in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 8.

reader and they detonate themselves as part of the same process. Needless to say, neither proposal has been immune to criticism from those hardier philosophers, in India and outside, who take evidential assent to be the mechanism for whatever transformation of mind may be called for (see §5.5). What we have learned from the investigations in Part I, however, is that speech-acts with therapeutic force are complex in structure and subject to subtle moral evaluation.

4.1 Philosophy as medicine

Extracting the true Buddhist doctrine about the self from the Buddha's actual sayings became, for the Buddhist scholars of medieval India, a substantive philosophical exercise. This was, in part, because of an essential aspect of the Buddha's dialogues, understood as constituting a distinct genre of philosophical literature: the dialogues of the Buddha are designed to lead their particular audience to or along the Buddhist path. The Buddhist hermeneutical interpreter cannot simply take the Buddha's words in such treatises at face value and neglect the specific conversational context in which they were uttered. What I will do in this chapter is to examine those passages in the works of Buddhist philosophers, primarily but not exclusively the three Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers, Nāgārjuna (*c.*150 CE), Āryadeva (*c.*180 CE), and Candrakīrti (*c.*600–650 CE), to determine what they had to say about this methodological problem, the problem of the proper way to uncover the philosophical truth behind the Buddha's recorded sayings. In Part III, I will reflect on that truth itself, looking in detail at different formulations of the Buddhist 'no self' theory of self.

The Buddha, as we have already noted, regarded his discovery as being almost impossible to teach; he resorted to 'indirect communication' in parables, similes and stories. One problem concerns the Buddha's truthfulness: did the Buddha sometimes lie, and if so, with what justification? The philosophical problem of the compassionate lie, and the more general hermeneutical problem of the Buddha's truthfulness, are ones that had to be confronted by the tradition of Buddhist hermeneutics.[2] Although

[2] The problem is addressed, for instance, in a text for which we have a third-century CE manuscript: Franco Eli (ed.), *The Spitzer Manuscript: The Oldest Philosophical Manuscript in Sanskrit* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004).

Nāgārjuna tries, on one occasion, to define the compassionate lie out of existence, the problem is not so easily dismissible.[3] A compassionate lie might well be morally justified but that does not turn it into a truth. The implication of the famous parable of the 'burning house' in the *Lotus Sūtra*, in which a father cajoles his children to leave the burning house with the false promise of toys, is that the compassionate lie is a skilful way to bring about the good.[4] The parable suggests that the Buddha's words, although untrue, encourage people to escape the burning house that is a person's lustful attachment to the world.[5] This in spite of some attempt to claim that no untruth is involved:

[The Buddha asks Śāriputra,] 'Śāriputra, what do you think ... was [the father] guilty of falsehood or not?' Śāriputra said, 'No, this rich man simply made it possible for his sons to escape the peril of fire and preserve their lives. He did not commit a falsehood ... because if they were able to preserve their lives, then they had already obtained a plaything of sorts. And how much more so when, through

[3] *Ratnāvalī* 2, 35: 'What is not deceitful is the truth; it is not an intentional fabrication. What is solely helpful to others is the truth. The opposite is falsehood since it does not help.' Trans. Jeffrey Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1998). The term 'true' might be used to denote any normative standard of appraisal against which statements are held accountable. Two candidates are 'correspondence with the facts' and 'beneficial utility'. Thus, to say in this sense that a useful statement is true is only to say that it meets, rather than fails to meet, the standard of appraisal against which it is being judged, here 'helpfulness'. A commentator on Āryadeva suggests a different solution, that 'true' is a predicate like 'big' or 'small', conventional statements being true for ordinary people but not for enlightened ones: 'A greenage is bigger than a date, but smaller than a cucumber. These two affirmations are both true. But if we say of the date that it is small and of the cucumber that it is big, this would be false.' G. Tucci, *Pre-Diṅnāga Texts on Logic from Chinese Sources* (Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. 49, 1929), p. 88. That may exonerate the use of ordinary speech by ordinary people, but what of the Buddha's use of ordinary speech?

[4] *The Lotus Sūtra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), chapter 3, pp. 56–62.

[5] Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began* (London: Athlone, 1996), p. 69, comments that 'I believe that the application of the concept "skill in means" to saying something untrue, albeit with the noblest motives, is an innovation.' The situation might remind one of Kierkegaard's description of his own indirect method of Socratic deceit: 'Do not be deceived by the word *deception*. One can deceive a person out of what is true, and—to recall old Socrates—one can deceive a person into what is true. Yes, in only this way can a deluded person actually be brought into what is true—by deceiving him.' Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for My Work as an Author, A Report to History, and Related Writings*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 53. Compare also Epictetus, who says, 'If one had to be deceived in order to learn that nothing eternal or beyond our decision is anything to us, I would welcome that deception, from which I could lead a well-flowing and undisturbed life' (*Discourses* 1.4.27). Gregory Vlastos takes issue with Kierkegaard, arguing that the purpose of Socratic irony is to 'taunt' and not to deceive; see 'Socrates' disavowal of knowledge', *Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1985): 1–20; reprinted in his *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); at pp. 64–5. On the Buddha, see also Appendix C below.

an expedient means, they are rescued from the burning house!' ... The Buddha said to Śāriputra, 'Very good, very good. It is just as you have said.'

We have seen in the previous chapter that telling the truth is not regarded as an unconditional duty: there are certain, very exceptional, situations in which it is morally admissible that a particular individual may lie or resort to other forms of deceit. The problem is not to do with the Buddha's virtue, any more than there is any question that the father acted improperly. Rather, the problem is that, if the Buddha as often says that there is a self as that there isn't, how are we to determine what is the truth of the matter?

The *protreptic* nature of the Buddha's reported discourse is unmistakable. I mean by this not merely that the dialogues are hortative, encouraging the interlocutor to take up and pursue the Buddhist way; I mean more specifically that the teachings are explicitly directed towards a 'turn' or transformation or reorientation in the mind of the listener (cf. *pro+trepein*: to turn, direct the course of). Commenting on the use of 'protreptic' by the Stoic, Epictetus (*c.*55–135 CE), A. A. Long says:

The term *protreptic* can scarcely be translated by a single English word. It refers to a type of exhortative or admonitory discourse, either in monologue or in question-and-answer form, designed to make persons rethink their ethical beliefs and convert to a fundamental change of outlook and behaviour.[6]

Epictetus himself says of protreptic that:

[i]t is the ability to show people, both individuals and groups, the inconsistency they are caught up in, and that they are focused on everything except what they want. For they want the sources of happiness, but they are looking for them in the wrong place.

(*Discourses* 3.23.34–5)

The proper grasp and reflective acceptance of the truths taught by the Buddha *upturns* the mind of the student, and transforms their vision. As a genre, the recorded dialogues of the Buddha are closer to the meditation or soliloquy than to the summa or disputation, their purpose is not primarily

[6] A. A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 54). S. R. Slings states that 'a text may be called protreptic if its design is to cause a change in the behaviour of those for whom it is destined.' S. R. Slings, *Plato: Clitophon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 59.

the resolution of a disputed claim or the refutation of a rival account.[7] As we saw in chapter 2, the Buddha's famous silence in the face of adversarial questioning is evidence that debate—even truth-directed debate—was simply not the order of the game. Silence, indeed, might hope to be transformative where entering into a debate cannot be, if it persuades the adversary that they have misunderstood the purpose of the discourse.

The fact that the Buddha's dialogues are, in this sense, protreptic explains why the Buddha is represented as stating, in his conversation with Kāśyapa in the *Āryaratnakūṭasūtra*, that it would be better to leave someone with a wrong view about the self than for the nature of his own teaching to be misunderstood. It is to make this point that the Buddha introduces a famous medical analogy:

[The Buddha] Better indeed, Kāśyapa, that someone holds the view that there are persons (*pudgaladṛṣṭi*) as firmly as if it were the Sumeru mountain than to cling to emptiness as a view (*śunyatādṛṣṭi*).
[Kāśyapa] What's the reason for that?
[The Buddha] Because, Kāśyapa, emptiness is the halting of all constructed views. He for whom emptiness is itself a view, however, I say is incurable. Kāśyapa, it's like a man who is sick. The doctor should give him some medicine. Suppose that the medicine removed all the ailments, but itself remained in the man's body. What do you think, Kāśyapa—would he then be free from sickness?
[Kāśyapa] Certainly not, O Lord. The man's sickness would be even more intense, the medicine remaining, having removed all the ailments.
[The Buddha] It's exactly in that way that emptiness is the halting of all constructed views. He for whom emptiness is itself a view, however, I say is incurable.[8]

[7] Dirk Schenkeveld, 'Philosophical prose', in Stanley Porter (ed.), *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 BC–AD 400* (Brill: Leiden, 1997), pp. 195–264, distinguishes in the Hellenistic period: protreptic, dialogue, diatribe, ego-documents and technical writings. Compare Eileen Sweeney, 'Literary forms in mediaeval philosophy', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2002 edn), who distinguishes in the mediaeval period: allegory, axiom, commentary, dialogue, disputation, meditation and soliloquy, sentences, sophismata and summa. See also Mark Jordan, 'Ancient philosophic protreptic and the problem of persuasive genres', *Rhetorica* 4 (1986): 309–33, on the cross-classification of protreptic.

[8] Quoted by Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* (B 248–9); 'B' refers to the pagination in Poussin's edition: Louis de la Vallée Poussin (ed.), *Mūlamadhyamakakārikāde Nāgārjuna avec la Prasannapadā Commentaire de Candrakīrti* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1903–13). The text is in P. L. Vaidya (ed.), *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the Commentary Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti* (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 2nd edn, 1987). In place of the *first* reference to incurability, A. von Staël–Holstein (ed.), *The Kāśyapa-parivarta: A Mahāyānasūtra of the Ratnakūṭa Class* (Peking: Commercial Press, 1926), pp. 95–7, reads 'Kāśyapa, emptiness is the halting of the view that there are persons (*pudgala*, distinct from streams of experiences); by what, Kāśyapa, shall emptiness *as a view* be halted?'

To someone so prone to mistake the nature of the Buddha's teaching on emptiness, it is better to tell them that the person exists, as indeed the Buddha did on a number of occasions. The Buddha's teachings are emetic, their function to purge the student of a false conception of themselves and their place in the world. We will encounter the medical analogy again in Dharmapāla, and it will be subject to critique by Maṇḍanamiśra (see §§5.1–2).

The comparison of philosophy to a medicine is a recurrent theme in the work of Epicurean and Stoic thinkers.[9] Thus Epicurus (341–271 BCE):

> Empty are the words of that philosopher who offers therapy for no human suffering. For just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not give therapy for bodily diseases, so too there is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul.[10]

And the Stoic Chrysippus (*c.*280–206 BCE):

> It is not true that there exists an art that we call medicine, concerned with the diseased body, but no corresponding art concerned with the diseased soul.[11]

With the role of philosophy in curing us of suffering, the Buddha will agree, but his use of the medical analogy is different in one crucial respect. He argues that the medicine must be an emetic or purgative: it must expel itself as well as the disease, for otherwise the treatment will be worse than the illness it was meant to cure. The illness is not suffering per se, but the attachment that causes suffering, and a transfer of attachment from its former object on to philosophy itself will render the patient completely incurable, hopelessly addicted to a terribly powerful drug. I'm sure no

[9] Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002a).

[10] A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), vol. 1, p. 155. Other fragments suggest that Epicurus saw the medical analogy not as implying that philosophy is a cure for an illness, but as having a role to play in sustaining a healthy life; thus Long and Sedley, p. 156: 'The medical analogy, then, should perhaps be read as making philosophical study comparable less to surgery or to drinking medicine than to lifelong healthy activity.'

[11] Quoted in Galen; trans. Nussbaum, *Therapy of Desire*, p. 316. Compare Cicero: 'There is, I assure you, a medical art for the soul. It is philosophy, whose aid need not be sought, as in bodily diseases, from outside ourselves. We must endeavour with all our resources and all our strength to become capable of doctoring ourselves' (*Tusculan Disputations* 3.6). Nussbaum suggests that, for the Stoics, 'Philosophy's medical function is understood as, above all, that of *toning up* the soul—developing its muscles, assisting it to use its own capabilities more effectively' (p. 317).

one would say that the Buddha understood the mechanisms of counter-transference, but he certainly appreciated the risk that his own teachings might become a surrogate object of attachment. The analogy of philosophy with a purgative drug is not absent from the Hellenistic world, however: it was introduced by the Hellenistic Sceptic, Sextus Empiricus (second century CE) in a specific context, and for a reason comparable to that of the early Mādhyamika interpreters of the Buddha (see next section).

My examination will concentrate on a fascinating discussion of the problem among the Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers in India. What we will see is that these Buddhist philosophers understood the Buddha's words not only as skilful teaching aids but also as speech-acts from whose illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects one can extract the true Buddhist doctrine.[12]

4.2 Āryadeva on the nature of protreptic and dialectic

Āryadeva, the pupil of Nāgārjuna (*c.*150 CE) and an important contributor to the foundation of Madhyamaka, discusses the proper way to read or receive the Buddha's words in a passage that clearly picks up themes from the Kāśyapa passage we have just examined:

> For an ordinary person, thinking in terms of a self is better than [trying to] think in terms of no self. They just get to a bad state [if they try]; only someone exceptional gets peace. [Thinking in terms of] no self is called the unrivalled door to peace, the terror of wrong views, and the sphere of all the Buddhas. Simply mentioning this teaching frightens ordinary people. What powerful thing doesn't frighten others, after all? The Tathāgatas didn't assert this teaching in order to be argumentative. Nonetheless, it burns up anti-theses, just as fire [burns up] fuel.
>
> (CŚ 12.12–15)[13]

The Buddha's words aim at a transformation. Their primary purpose is neither to *refute* alternative views, nor to *prove* the truth of the Buddha's own.

[12] In this, they may anticipate Quentin Skinner's contextualist method for the history of philosophy. See Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), vol. 1. I discuss the application of Skinner's methods to India in my 'Contextualism in the study of Indian philosophical cultures', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History*, special issue of *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (forthcoming).

[13] V. Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Catuḥśataka of Āryadeva, Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts with Copious Extracts from the Commentary of Candrakīrti* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1974). Trans. Karen Lang, *Āryadeva's*

Their principal function is protreptic and not dialectic.[14] The background to Āryadeva's remark lies in the idea that the transformation to which the Buddha's words are aimed is available only to someone who is sufficiently open-minded, not overly wedded to their own views or to the practice of argumentation and debate, a person who will not be too distressed to discover that what they have believed until now is mistaken (CŚ 12.24–5). Such a person is, as I put it before, *receptive* to the truth. If the listener's mind is closed, however, no simple statement of the Buddha's teaching will open it, nor will those teachings have the desired protreptic effect. Āryadeva argues that one ought not to give up altogether on such a person, for they can still be helped to lead a good and virtuous life. The way to do this is to exploit their own attachment to self, encouraging them to live better lives and develop their own virtue by tapping their prudential motives of self-concern. A well-conducted life will take one to heaven—though not any further:

> By means of virtuous conduct (*śīla*), one reaches heaven; by means of the [right] view, one attains the highest state of all. (12.11cd)... In brief, the Tathāgatas interpret good conduct (*dharma*) as non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and nirvāṇa as emptiness (*śūnyatā*). For us, there are only these two.
>
> (12.23)

Āryadeva's view is that neither the cultivation of the self per se, nor the development of one's virtue, requires that transformation in thinking which is the final protreptic orientation of the Buddha's teaching. Nor can the transformation be brought about by an engagement solely at the level of debate and argumentation (which is not to deny that debate has a great importance of its own, especially in the resolution of doctrinal differences between divergent Buddhist schools, and as a way of honing the intellectual virtues). The Mādhyamika Buddhist identifies 'thesis-thinking' (*prapañca;* i.e. thinking of one's experience in the conventional way, as presenting to them an objective world of objects) as the primary source of attachment and suffering. How then to persuade a person to let go, someone whose mind is

Catuḥśataka: On the Bodhisattva's Cultivation of Merit and Knowledge (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1986), modified.

[14] This is not to deny that dialectic can also be used protreptically, as is illustrated by the two protreptic arguments in Plato's *Euthydemus*. Dialectic, in such cases, is an exercise in collaborative learning; see Christopher Gill, 'Protreptic and dialectic in Plato's *Euthydemus*', in Thomas M. Robinson and Luc Brisson (eds), *Plato: Euthydemus, Lysis and Charmides: Proceedings of the Vth Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2000), pp. 133–43.

not closed but who is nevertheless still in the grip of 'thesis-thinking'? One must, of course, introduce them to the ideas of emptiness and no-self, and do so in terms they will understand. For, as Āryadeva says, 'just as a foreigner cannot be made to understand through any language other [than his own], so the world cannot be made to understand without the use of conventional language'.[15] In the mind of someone who accepts and comes to believe the thesis of emptiness, that belief functions like a solvent, breaking down their beliefs just as a detergent might break down oil. In Āryadeva's own metaphor, it 'burns up' the person's beliefs without refuting them, as fire burns fuel. It acts on the commitment to believing rather than on the content believed. The thesis that all theorizing is empty enters the mind of the student as a kind of 'Trojan text'; if successful, it results in a transformation of that mind into one which truly experiences the empty world as empty, a mind that stands in a different type of cognitive relationship with the world. So the formulation of emptiness as a *thesis* is a tactical and protreptic move. As a *thesis*, it too is empty. It is just a shadow thrown by the truth (which is, indeed, that all is empty) on to the level of the conventional—the best one can do if one wants to formulate in everyday concepts something that will enter the mind of the audience and burn away at their attachment to views. Incurable is he in whom this fire freezes into still another view.

It is exactly for this reason that Nāgārjuna does not contradict himself when he claims to deny all views, and then goes on to formulate the 'view' that all views are empty. We must simply remember the 'Trojan' status of that formulation.[16] Nāgārjuna tries an analogy. He says that the situation is like that in which a person concocted through magic (*māyā*) helps to expose as concocted a second magically concocted person.[17] Formulated as a thesis, the thesis of emptiness is itself a mere simulacrum of the truth, but it is nevertheless able to expose other theses as empty. Let me try an analogy

[15] CŚ 8.19. This translation follows a rendering of the idiomatic Tibetan by C. W. Huntington Jr. and Geshé Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), p. 235, n. 54.

[16] Āryadeva, *Śataśāstra* [ŚŚ] 10.22–7: 'In order to refute these false conceptions, we expound "the refutation," but really there is nothing to be refuted.' The text is extant only in Chinese translation, and has been rendered into English by G. Tucci, *Pre-Diṅnāga Texts on Logic from Chinese Sources* (Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, no. 49, 1929), pp. 87–8.

[17] *Vigrahavyāvartanī* [V] 23, 27. Critical edit by E. H. Johnston and A. Kunst, *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna: Vigrahavyāvartanī* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986). On the metaphor of the 'magician', see further my *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 66–8.

of my own. Suppose that within a particular work of fiction there are two characters, one of whom says to the other, 'You are merely a character in a work of fiction.' Embedded as it is in the narrative of the fiction, that statement itself has only as much truth as all fictional statements have, yet it serves nevertheless to expose the statements of the other as merely 'true-in-fiction'. This point would not be undermined by the second character's rejoinder, 'Well, you are just a character in a work of fiction too.' The same basic idea—that a vehicle of representation can have as its content a *truth* that nevertheless implies that the vehicle itself is empty or unreal or merely illusory—will be explored in much greater detail in chapter 5.

When Sextus Empiricus introduces the analogy between philosophy and a purgative drug, he does so with the aim of distancing himself from a definite affirmation of his own sceptical statements and proofs. Thus:

> In the case of all the sceptical phrases, you should understand that we do not affirm definitely that they are true—after all, we say that they can be destroyed by themselves, being cancelled along with what they are applied to, just as purgative drugs do not merely drain the humours from the body but drive themselves out too along with the humours.
>
> (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1.206; trans. J. Annas and J. Barnes)

> Arguments, like purgative drugs which evacuate themselves along with the matters present in the body, can actually cancel themselves along with the other arguments which are said to be probative. This is not incongruous, since the phrase 'Nothing is true' not only denies everything else but also turns itself about at the same time.
>
> (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 2.188)

In the third place where this idea is mentioned, Sextus even introduces an analogy with combustion (Āryadeva, however, did not say that fire burns up itself, only that it burns up the fuel):

> There are many things that do to themselves what they do to other things. For example, just as fire, after consuming the fuel, destroys also itself, and as cathartic drugs, after driving out the fluids from bodies expel themselves as well, so it is possible for an argument against proof, besides refuting every proof, to apply also to itself.
>
> (*Against the Mathematicians* 8.480; trans. B. Mates)

For Sextus, as for his rough contemporary, Āryadeva, philosophical argument serves to erode our willingness to affirm anything definitely, including eventually the philosophical argument itself. If there is a difference between them, it is that the Sceptic's 'suspension of judgment' (*epochē*) is not quite the Mādhyamika's dissolution of thesis-thinking (*prapañca*), this because the former advocates giving up *evaluating* concepts while the latter recommends giving up *possessing* the concepts (see also §2.3).[18] As we will see in more detail below, the aim of philosophy for a Mādhyamika is to achieve that transformation of mind which harmonizes the individual with the truth indirectly expressed in the Buddha's words.

4.3 The road leading to the city of nirvāṇa: Candrakīrti

In his analysis of the status of the Buddha's discourse, Candrakīrti (*c.*600 CE) employs another hermeneutical device. He appeals to a well-attested distinction between those statements of the Buddha that represent 'definitive' or drawn-out (*nītārtha*) teachings and those statements whose meaning is 'non-definitive' or in need of drawing out (*neyārtha*).[19]

That the 'storehouse consciousness' exists, that persons do exist, that only the psychophysical aggregates exist—all these are teachings given for those who cannot understand the deepest meaning.

[18] After an extended review of comparable passages, Thomas McEvilley concludes that '[i]t is hard to identify any significant difference between either the methods or the stated purposes of Pyrrhonist and Mādhyamika dialectic.' *The Structure of Ancient Thought: Comparative Studies in Greek and Indian Philosophies* (New York: Allworth Press, 2002), p. 484. Although I think this considerably overstates the case, I agree that the similarities between the formulations of Sextus Empiricus and those of the earliest Mādhyamika authors are important. That does not yet establish a diffusion thesis, however, for as well as coincidence it is also possible that there is a common origin. As noted above, the purgative analogy is already in the *Kāśyapa-parivarta*, which itself purports to document earlier oral teachings that were in circulation.

[19] The distinction between definitive and non-definitive statements is traceable back to the Nikāya; for example, Aṅguttara Nikāya i 60: 'There are these two who misrepresent the Tathāgata. Which two? The one who represents a Sutta of definitive meaning as a Sutta of non-definitive meaning, and the one who represents a Sutta of non-definitive meaning as a Sutta of definitive meaning.' This is another example of a text itself telling us how to read it.

The Buddha, not thinking that the aggregates composed a self, did yet say 'I' and spoke of 'these *my* teachings.' In such a way, though things are certainly without intrinsic being, He taught non-definitively and said they are.

(MA 6.43–4)[20]

The non-definitive teachings are those which can be interpreted only with respect to their intended protreptic effect, in a particular dialogical context. The definitive teachings are those that can be interpreted in abstraction from any particular dialogical context.

Candrakīrti says that it was Nāgārjuna's real intention, in composing the *Mūlamadhyamakaśāstra* (MK), to supply the philosophical basis for this distinction, thereby recovering the context-free philosophical system that provides the justificatory ground for the Buddha's various context-specific interventions.[21] The exegetical method under discussion is, indeed, developed further, and related yet more firmly with the problem of the self, in Candrakīrti's commentary on MK 18.6. A famous verse, MK 18.6 states that:

There's a teaching that there is a self, but the Buddhas have also indicated that there is no self; and they have indicated that there isn't at all a self or no self.

How is one to make sense of these apparently inconsistent messages? And what might the Buddha's real view be? Candrakīrti explains the meaning of the verse in the following way:

In this world, there are those whose mind's eye is entirely covered (*avacchādita*) by the veil that is the darkness of massive error (*kudarśana*). They do not see what is readily at hand, even though it is not beyond the scope of normal people with clear vision. Anchored as they are in the everyday world (*vyavahāra-satya*), they

[20] *Madhyamakāvatāra*; available only in Tibetan translation: Louis de la Vallée Poussin (ed.), *Madhyamakāvatāra par Candrakīrti* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1907–12). Several translations of chapter 6 (on the self) are available: Louis de la Vallée Poussin, in *Muséon* 12 (1912): 235–328 (French); C. W. Huntington Jr. and Geshé Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Geshé Rabten, *Echoes of Voidness*, ed. and trans. Stephen Batchelor (London: Wisdom Publication, 1983); Helena Blankleder and Wulstan Fletcher, Padmakara Translation Group, *Introduction to the Middle Way: Candrakīrti's Madhyamakāvatāra* (Boston and London: Shambala, 2002).

[21] Candrakīrti: '[I]t is therefore the case that this *Madhyamakaśāstra* has been composed by the master [Nāgārjuna] in order to demonstrate the distinction between a canonical text of provisional meaning and one of definitive meaning (*neyanītārthasūtrāntavibhāgopadarśana*)' (PP B41); trans. D. S. Ruegg, *Two Prolegomena to Buddhist Philosophy* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 2002), p. 78.

lend their approval only to the existence of what they call earth, water, fire and air. They believe only in minds produced, like a foetus, in a thorough maturation of the elements ... and they deny that there is a self or soul (*ātman*) or a world beyond .... Denying this, they are constantly predisposed to act wrongly ... In order that they leave off from this false view, the noble Buddhas, as master physicians and doctors of great illness and complete affliction ... sometimes lay it down that there is perhaps, according to worldly ways of thinking, a self or soul (*ātman*), so as to bring to an end the wrong acts of those who are not acting well ....

Then there are those who are tethered, as if they are birds, by a loose and very long 'great thread' (*mahāsūtra*), a strap that binds them to the view that the self is a real entity (*sadbhūtātmadṛṣṭi*). These people have journeyed very far, to be sure. They have left the path that leads one to act wrongly, and indeed they act very well. Nevertheless, they are unable to reach (*abhigam-*; to reach, to comprehend) the city that is nirvāṇa .... The noble Buddhas, wishing to be kind to those in need of instruction, indicated to them that the self is to be denied, so as to produce in them a passionate desire to reach nirvāṇa. The purpose of this was so that this middle group loosen their attachment to the false view about the self (*satkāya-darśana*).

Then there are those who have cultivated their propensity for the profound truth, which they have already approached, and who are in the vicinity of nirvāṇa. These eminent students no more have any self-interest (*ātmasneha*) and are ready to go deeply into the very profound truth as described by the foremost sage. Recognising their potential, [it was said that:] '[t]he Buddhas have sometimes indicated that there isn't at all a self or no self.' For just as the view that there is a self isn't the truth of the matter, so neither indeed is the contrary view, that there is no self, the truth of the matter. So that is why it is indicated that there isn't a self at all and neither is there at all no self.

(PP B356–8)

Candrakīrti plays with the metaphor of a journey, the end point being the city that is nirvāṇa, and the Buddhas' advice serving to cajole people along and prevent them from veering off course. The carefree material hedonist is regarded as having the furthest to go, in need of the most help: they need to be shown that there are reasons to care. They are followed by those in the middle, who care a little too much, and about the wrong things. These are the ones Āryadeva had said can, as they are, reach heaven, but no further. It's only to the ones who are, as it were, at the city gates, and need a last final 'Come on! You can do it!', that the Buddhas relate the

deep, hidden, profound truth (a truth so odd that it might almost be out of sheer curiosity that they take the last few steps, just as telling a joke can help someone forget their fatigue). A clear distinction is drawn, in this passage, between the goal, which is nirvāṇa, and the definitive truth as taught by the Buddha, which is spoken only so that they reach the goal. As I stressed in some detail in chapter 2, this does not make that truth of merely *instrumental* value.

In support of his interpretation, Candrakīrti mentions a passage in Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī*:

> Just as a grammar teacher has students [first] study the matrix of letters, so the Buddha taught trainees the doctrines according to what they were capable of. To some he taught doctrines to turn them away from ill-deeds; to some, to lead them towards merit. To others, [he taught doctrines] of both sorts. To a few, [he taught doctrines] of neither sort, profound (*gambhīra*), frightening to the fearful, consisting in emptiness and compassion, the means of achieving enlightenment (*bodhisādhana*).
>
> (R 4.94–96)[22]

I will attempt to explicate Candrakīrti's idea with the help of a modern logical notion, the notion of non-monotonicity. Logical validity is normally thought to be monotonic; that is to say, an argument's validity is preserved under the addition of new premises. If q is entailed by $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$, then it is entailed by $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n, p_{n+1}$. Epistemic justification, on the other hand, is probably non-monotonic: a belief justified by a given body of evidence might cease to be justified if that body of evidence is *supplemented* by a piece of new evidence (I'm justified in believing that I see an animal in front of me, but not if I'm then told I have been slipped an hallucinogenic drug). How does this apply to the nature of the Buddha's teaching? In the mind of the Buddha's given audience is a set of beliefs $p_1, p_2, \ldots, p_n$, and these beliefs jointly justify a further belief q inconsistent with the definitive truth. Instead of simply denying or refuting q and leaving the audience to their own devices, the Buddha more skilfully asserts a new belief p_{n+1}. This new belief is tailored to the beliefs of his

[22] Quoted by Candrakīrti, at PP B359. Hopkins translates slightly differently from the Tibetan: Jeffrey Hopkins, *Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation: Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1998), p. 147. See also John Dunne and Sara McClintock, *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King: A Translation of Nāgārjuna's Text from the Sanskrit and Tibetan* (Boston: Wisdom, 1997), p. 71.

audience, chosen so that, in conjunction with them, the target belief *q* is no longer justified. In that sense, it is non-definitive: it is not asserted out of any commitment to its truth or falsity, but solely for its effect. On the assumption that the audience is rational, their belief *q* will indeed, after some time, 'burn' away. One can imagine easily enough how this process could be refined by the introduction of mediate states of belief, just as Candrakīrti suggests that the non-Buddhist is led first to the belief in storehouse consciousness as a mediate step, and then to a rejection of that belief.

In the context of such an understanding of the nature of Buddhist protreptic, a principled distinction can be drawn between the activity of the Buddhist philosopher and the activity of the Buddhist practitioner. The practitioner takes at face value the words of the Buddha (or their Buddhist teacher), allowing those words to have their intended protreptic effect in urging the practitioner along the path towards a transformation of mind. On the other hand, a Buddhist philosopher, a Nāgārjuna or Candrakīrti, is trying to recover from underneath the protreptic utterances the definitive truth. To do this, the philosopher has to look at the intended effect of the Buddha's statements on a given set of background beliefs rather than attend only to those statements themselves or take them at face value.

The Tibetan hermeneutical philosophers introduce a term—*dgoṅs gži*—for the definitive truth on the basis of which the Buddha protreptically asserts additional information for the benefit of his particular audience. D. Seyfort Ruegg, introducing two concepts from contemporary philosophy of language, argues that the relationship between the non-definitive assertion and the grounding definitive truth is a relationship of presupposition and Gricean implicature:

Given the requirement, from the point of view of systematical hermeneutics, to postulate an unexpressed *dgoṅs gži* in certain of the Buddha's utterances which are in some specific way non-concordant or incompatible with the final and definitive doctrine within the frame of a given philosophical system—namely in those Sūtra-passages which the hermeneuticians describe as *ābhiprāyika* and *neyārtha* and as being motivated by particular salvific purposes (*prayojana*) entertained by the Buddha in order provisionally to help the specific and special addressees (*vineya*) of these Sūtras ... the *dgoṅs gži* is for the hermeneutician a *systemic implicature*—or a *systemic presupposition*—in the particular communicative situation where the

Buddha teaches a special (type of) addressee by means of an utterance having above all a perlocutionary effect.[23]

The claim is that in uttering the non-definitive sentence, the Buddha implicates—not indeed to the addressee, but to the hermeneutical philosopher interpreting his remark—the proposition he intends the trainee to come to believe. The attraction of this proposal is that it explains why the Buddha's assertion is not simply false and even manipulative, that is, why it is not straightforwardly a lie. The proposal is that the Buddha's assertion, though literally false, implicates something true. This is exactly the converse of the way things were with Yudhiṣṭhira's deceitful assertion in the *Mahābhārata* that the kuñjara is dead, which, though literally true, implicated something false (see §3.5). The difficulty with Ruegg's proposal, nevertheless, is that its truth requires that it be possible for an assertion to implicate something *out of* its own context of utterance, to a quite different audience; even if this is indeed possible, it stretches credibility to imagine that the Buddha had an audience of hermeneutical philosophers in mind whenever he spoke (nor can Buddhists avail themselves of the casuistic resource of thinking they are speaking truly before God, if not before man). It seems more reasonable to describe the situation as one in which the Buddha's non-definitive assertion *presupposes* but does not *implicate* a truth and that later hermeneutical philosophers extract the presupposition through an analysis of the speech-act. The drawback with *that* is that we lose the initially attractive consequence of the proposal which was that it permitted us to say that the Buddha implicated something true and so did not lie. Nor indeed is presupposition the right formal notion to capture the relationship. A presupposition is something that must be true if the sentence is to have any truth-value at all, but what's at issue here is not the truth-aptness or meaningfulness of the Buddha's non-definitive assertion; what's in question is its actual truth-value.

The puzzle is rather one of explication. As interpreters of the corpus of the Buddha's remarks, the Buddhist philosopher is seeking an explanation that renders intelligible *why* each one is made. A principle of charity will guide this search for rational explication, namely, that the Buddha's

[23] David Seyfort Ruegg, 'Purport, implicature and presupposition: Sanskrit *abhiprāya* and Tibetan *dgoṅs pa/dgoṅs gži* as hermeneutical concepts', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 13 (1985): 309–25; at pp. 316–18.

intention is to bring his audience to what is, by his own lights, the truth. In other words, the principle of charity that guides the interpretive practice is equivalent to an assumption of the Buddha's compassion. And if the best way to make sense of some specific utterance of the Buddha is as leading the given audience to a certain belief, then the interpreter will, in accordance with this principle of charity, attribute that belief to the Buddha.[24] None of this, however, will permit us to say that the interpreted utterance asserts, implies, implicates or presupposes the belief whose ascription to the Buddha renders intelligible the fact of its being uttered: the Buddha's non-definitive statements do not have a 'deep' meaning in any of *those* senses. So the Buddha was right: he does not speak with a teacher's closed fist; there is no esoteric *meaning* in what he says—his statements mean what they seem to mean. That does not preclude the exegete from deriving conclusions about why the Buddha chose to say and mean what he does and when.

The Buddha's definitive teaching about the self is that there is neither self nor non-self, or so claim the Mādhyamikas. It is a mistake, albeit a rather subtle one, to think that the concept *self* has a representative function or referential role at all. I will examine the substantive content of this definitive doctrine about the concept *self* in chapter 7. In spite of this being his true position, the Buddha was not unwilling to assert both that there is a self and that there is no self. The assertion that there is a self is made for an audience of materialist hedonists who take it that all there is are the material elements, and who can make no sense within that metaphysics of a notion of personal moral responsibility. The Buddha supplements their beliefs with another, that there is such a thing as personal identity and so personal responsibility, and in doing so provides them with the beginnings of a world-view in which their moral scepticism ceases to make sense. Another audience does indeed have a well-entrenched conception of personal identity and moral responsibility, the problem now being that it is too well-entrenched. Their prudential self-concern is exaggerated to

[24] See Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford University Press, 1984), essays 9, 10 and 11. Candrakīrti's willingness to entertain the possibility that the true intentions of the Buddha can be recovered in a process of textual analysis reveals that there is a considerable difference between him and the postmodernists like Derrida. Derrida thinks that we can infer nothing about, for example, Nietzsche's intentions from the discovery of the written text 'I have forgotten my umbrella', although we do, of course, know what the words mean. See Jacques Derrida, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 123–31. The Mādhyamika method is, as mentioned above, more in keeping with Skinner's contextualism.

the point that they are incapable of attaching any value to altruistic moral motivation (on this, see Appendix B). To help an audience such as this, the Buddha again seeks to effect a revision in their beliefs, this time a revision by deletion rather than by supplementation. Without the belief that there is a self, but with the remaining structure of their prudential world-view in place, the implication that self-concern is the only form of moral concern ceases to be warranted. Teaching 'no-self' to this audience does not turn them into materialist hedonists for the simple reason that the supporting structure of their beliefs—the residue after the belief in self has been deleted—is quite different from the belief-scheme of a hedonist. Someone who responds to this teaching of no-self with a reversion to materialistic hedonism would have grasped the Buddha's teaching in quite the wrong way. Fully absorbed, this second act of protreptic leaves its audience 'at the gates' and ready for the definitive truth that will carry them through (this last 'raft' is, however, but one of three).

We might contrast this with the method adopted by Prajāpati to teach Indra about the self. In describing that method, I introduced the notion of a 'preparatory condition', an idea or thesis that the student must come to see for themselves to be *false* if they are to be ready to appreciate a more nuanced view (see §1.1). Indra kept coming back for further instruction when he realized that the doctrine he had previously been taught could not be true. In Candrakīrti's model, on the other hand, the student's full *absorption* of an earlier doctrine is the precondition they must satisfy if they are to be ready to take on something more nuanced. In both models, most of the cognitive work is done by the students themselves, but in one case the work involved is *seeing through a deception* while in the other case it is *thinking through a conception*. We have, then, two quite different models for the kind of cognitive labour that is required to cure oneself of the deep errors about self. The models disagree about which intellectual virtues need to be developed, about what wisdom (*prajñā*) consists in. For the first, it is a matter of knowing how and where to direct the inner gaze. For the other, it is a matter of reflective acceptance and receptivity, knowing how to let the truth blow through.[25]

[25] It is interesting to compare these ideas with related ones in the philosophy of antiquity. There too, the idea of graded teachings appropriate to different levels of spiritual progress is to be found, especially among the Neoplatonists. For references, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 99–100, esp. n. 139. Noting that both Stoics

It would seem to be Candrakīrti's view that the *addition* of a belief in self to the belief-scheme of the hedonist leads to a global revision of belief, and results eventually in the belief-scheme of the prudential egoist; that the *deletion* of a belief in self from *that* scheme results in a second global revision of belief, and results eventually in the person's being on the very threshold of nirvāṇa, a bodhisattva; and that a final declaration of the definitive truth that there is neither self nor no self results in the crossing over; so that the net effect of the whole process is precisely the transformation of mind at which the Buddha protreptically aims. His elegant three-stage model of transformation considerably elaborates the idea of the Buddha's teaching being a 'middle way' between two extremes, as that idea is formulated, for example, in the *Ratnakūṭa*:

That there is a self, Kāśyapa, is one point of view. That there is no self is an alternative point of view. That which lies between these two points of view is without nature, beyond sight, without relation or foundation, without an abode, unconceptualisable. Kāśyapa, it is said to be the middle way, a proper investigation of how things stand.[26]

For Candrakīrti, it is rather that belief in self and belief in no-self are necessary steps in the progression to a point of view from which the notion of self plays no part at all. Thus it is that Candrakīrti asserts, in his comments to Āryadeva's CŚ 12.15, that although the Buddha's words are not made with the refutation of false views as their purpose, any more than a fire is made for the purpose of burning fuel rather than for cooking, still they serve to break attachments to those false views, to 'burn' them up in the minds of the audience. The purpose of the Buddha's words, he says there too, is to be a 'doorway to liberation' (*vimokḍamukha*).[27] This is the reason the Buddha said what he did.

and Epicureans are committed to the idea of philosophy as a guide to life, Hadot suggests that there is this difference between their understanding of the aim of spiritual exercise: 'For the former, it means mental tension and constant wakefulness of the moral conscience; for the latter, it is an invitation to relaxation and serenity' (p. 88).

[26] Quoted by Candrakīrti, at PP, B 358.

[27] And the doors of a city are as much a part of its infrastructure as are the walls and the floors: the truth is not merely instrumental. For text and translation: Tom Tillemans, *Materials for the Study of Āryadeva, Dharmapāla and Candrakīrti* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1990), vols I and II.

4.4 'Don't believe!': Dharmapāla's understanding of religious language

Curiously, Dharmapāla (530–561 CE) wrote a commentary on a Mādhyamika work even though he himself belongs to a quite different Buddhist school.[28] It makes a nice interlude to compare the interpretation he gives of Āryadeva with that of the orthodox Mādhyamika, Candrakīrti. I will return to the main theme of this chapter in the concluding section.

While both agree that the intended effect of the Buddha's teachings is a transformation in the mind's *relationship* with the world, and not simply a change in the *content* of the followers' beliefs, Dharmapāla understands the transformation in terms of *suspension* rather than, as we will see for Candrakīrti, circumspection. Returning to the medical analogy, Dharmapāla represents the Buddha's teachings as an antidote to the poison that is the will to structure the world according to one's own concepts and categories:

> [Query:] What is the point in the Noble One's explanation of the doctrine of emptiness? [Response:] It is in order to dispel all false grasping at existence. [Objection:] If that were the case, then he should also say that all dharmas exist in order to dispel erroneous grasping at the emptiness of all dharmas. [Reply:] That is true. If someone grasps dharmas as empty, then the Tathāgata also states that dharmas exist. (219b17) … Now, the Tathāgata, in order to dispel the demon of evil views, explained the antidote (*ājiē tuó* = *agada*), i.e. selflessness.
>
> (220a7)

The difference between Dharmapāla and Candrakīrti lies in this. Candrakīrti sees the Buddha's words as having their effect through a process of what we might call *internal* protreptic. The Buddha's true teaching is given a conceptual garb, presented in a form that an ordinary mind will find

[28] He is, perhaps, the grandpupil of Dignāga; see Tom Tillemans, *Scripture, Logic, Language: Essays on Dharmakīrti and His Tibetan Successors* (Boston: Wisdom, 1999), pp. 32–3. In *Materials*, Tillemans has made available Dharmapāla's commentary which is extant only in Chinese. I use his translation but substitute 'empty' for his 'void'. Care must certainly be exercised in making use of Dharmapāla's work; it needs to be properly contextualized in order fully to appreciate the subtlety of some of his moves. I am using him here simply to help throw light on the application of protreptic hermeneutics in Buddhism.

intelligible. Once understood, the veiled—and to *that* extent misrepresented—doctrine works on the mind from within, leading the mind through an understanding of the emptiness of all conceptual labour to search for some proper cognitive response—a reorientation in the mind's relationship with the world. Dharmapāla, however, sees the transformational process as one of *external* protreptic. He claims that the Buddha's words controvert and counteract whatever beliefs the conceiving mind happens to have. If his audience believes *p*, then the Buddha declares *not-p*; if the audience believes *not-p*, the Buddha declares *p*. Dharmapāla's method does not, as Candrakīrti's did, have stages and levels; it is not described in terms of an intellectual journey. There is no biographical story of moral progression. The hoped-for effect of *this* exercise is that the audience gives up believing at all (whatever they had formerly believed), abandoning the habitual attempt to grasp the world in concepts.

Once again, the proposal seems to imply that none of the Buddha's statements is sincere or even true, as Dharmapāla is well aware:

> [Objection:] Since, to dispel grasping, he teaches existence and he teaches emptiness, then is the true nature of all dharmas emptiness or existence? [Reply:] The true nature of all dharmas is neither existence nor emptiness; it completely transcends the proliferations of conceptualization.
>
> [Objection:] Then why are the Noble One's statements not false? [Reply:] It is because they are destined to exclude mistaken grasping that they are not false.
>
> [Objection:] The teachings of emptiness and those of existence both exclude grasping, so why then does the Tathāgata more often preach the teaching of emptiness? [Reply:] It is because sentient beings for the most part grasp at existence, [and] saṃsāra mostly comes about from grasping at existence. Therefore, the Tathāgata, in order to exclude grasping at existence and to extinguish the suffering of saṃsāra, mostly preaches the teaching of emptiness.
>
> [Objection:] Whether [dharmas are] empty or whether they are existent, this is all a [question of] teaching approaches. Why then was it previously stated [in this text] that emptiness is the true nature [of dharmas]? [Reply:] Method and metaphorical description (*jiǎ shuō* = *upacāra*) are not contradictory. Besides which, this statement of emptiness is a negation (*zhē* = *pratiṣedha*) and not a positive assertion. Not just is there emptiness, but emptiness is empty too. By dispelling completely all grasping thoughts one brings oneself into conformity with the ultimate true nature of all dharmas which is neither existence nor emptiness. The true nature of all dharmas is not really emptiness, but since one takes emptiness as an

approach, then metaphorically [the true nature of dharmas] is taken to be emptiness.

[Objection:] If the true nature [of dharmas] is not emptiness, but emptiness is taken as the approach, then [similarly] given that the true nature [of dharmas] is not existence, existence should be taken as an approach. [Reply:] One explains [various] approaches according to [different] occasions [i.e. according to the disciples' capacities], so existence too is not wrong. Still, the essential point of the [Buddha's] approach accords with emptiness.

(219b20–219c1)

Dharmapāla says that the statements of the Buddha are not false because they are 'destined to exclude mistaken graspings'. In other words, they are not really statements at all but rather *invitations* to stop. To any judgement *p*, the Buddha responds with 'No! Not *p*', where the full weight lies on the 'No', a call for the judgement—whatever it be—*not* to be made. The statement 'all is empty' is, likewise, a pure denial or refutation (*pratiṣedha*), a demand that the assertion that the conventional object of thought exist be withdrawn. To be consistent, we must add that the Buddha's statement 'objects exist' is also a pure refutation, this time of the claim that all is empty. So the reason that the Buddha's sayings are not false is that they are not *statements* at all and so are neither true nor false. They are calls of 'enough!'

This technique is, Dharmapāla concedes, a dangerous one, more likely to frighten away than to aid a person of lesser intellectual capabilities. Dharmapāla refers to the dialogue with Kāśyapa and interprets its significance as being that an adept who is unlikely to be able to take the point of the refutation is better helped by encouraging them in their beliefs than by refuting them.

Dharmapāla's is an expressivist or emotivist account of the Buddha's discourse. The Buddha's words do not assert anything but express an attitude, in this case an attitude of general disapproval (or rather: disapproval if the adept is intellectually robust enough and approval if not). The troubling consequence of it is that although Dharmapāla can successfully argue that the Buddha's words are not false, he cannot also argue that they are true. Candrakīrti, in contrast, has some hope of maintaining that things *are* as the Buddha says they are, even though saying this runs the risk of performative self-contradiction (see also chapter 5 on the 'true content, false vehicle' principle).

4.5 The internal exile of the transformed mind

Is there more to be said with regard to the Buddha's unconcealed truth? Some of the Buddha's sayings are regarded as indicative of his definitive view:

'Monks, the highest reality-principle (*satya*) is *nirvāṇa* which has the property of being not deceptive; and the conditioning factors are false and deceptive, etc.' And, 'Here there exists no Thusness, no true Thusness (*avitathatā*): this has the property of being deceptive, this has the property of failing, this is false, this is a magical creation, the prattle of the foolish.' And, 'The material (*rūpa*) is like a ball of foam, feeling (*vedanā*) is like a bubble, conception (*saṃjñā*) is like a mirage, the conditioning factors (*saṃskāra*) are like drift-wood, cognition (*vijñāna*) is like a magical creation: so has spoken [the Buddha born of] the Solar lineage.'[29]

Nāgārjuna's procedure of hermeneutical extraction results in the following formulation of the definitive truth:

In this consists the very depth of our doctrine (*dharma-gāmbhīrya*), that it remains a secret (*guhya*) to ordinary people. That the world is to be compared with a magic play (*māyopamatvaṃ lokasya*) is the essence of the teaching of the buddhas (*buddhānāṃ śāsanāmṛta*).

(R 2.9)[30]

A mind seeing the world aright achieves what we might call a 'cognitive distance' from the deliverances of experience and conceptualization. The world we see is seen *as if* it were an illusion or trick (*māyopama*). It is important that Nāgārjuna uses an analogy, and not a metaphor: he does not say that the world *is* an illusion, but rather that it is *like* one. In other words, the transformed mind achieves an attitude towards its experiences that is *analogous* to the attitude an ordinary mind strikes towards illusions or

[29] These statements are collated by Candrakīrti at PP, B 41; trans. Ruegg, *Two Prolegomena*, p. 80. The last abridges the *Aṣṭādaśasāharikā* 74: 'Material is like a mass of foam, it has no solidity, it is full of cracks and holes, and it has no substantial inner core. Feeling is like a bubble, which swiftly rises and swiftly disappears, and it has no durable subsistence. Perception is like a mirage. As in a mirage pool absolutely no water at all can be found. Impulses are like the trunk of a plantain tree: when you strip off one leaf-sheath after another nothing remains, and you cannot lay hand on a core within. Consciousness is like a mock show, as when magically created soldiers, conjured up by a magician, are seen marching through the streets.' Trans. Edward Conze, *Selected Sayings from the Perfection of Wisdom* (Boulder: Prajna Press, 1978), p. 96.

[30] Here I follow Tucci. Hopkins's translation is flatter: 'That which is secret for a common being is the profound doctrine, the world is like an illusion, the ambrosia of the Buddhas' teaching.'

magical tricks. This point sheds light on the old question, whether Śaṅkara was a crypto-Buddhist: the Advaitin drops the 'similar to' (*upama*) and asserts that the world is indeed a magic play. That's possible for a theist, who has a magician at hand, but not for a Buddhist.[31] We will look at the Advaitic attitude in the next chapter.

Many illusions exhibit a kind of independence from belief, the illusion persisting even when one knows that it is an illusion. That might seem to pose a problem for the Buddhist claim that transformation of mind is an essentially cognitive enterprise. We see in Nāgārjuna's remark a resolution of the puzzle—the flow of experience and conceptualization carries on, but in a mind transformed the attitude towards that flow of experience has undergone a radical change. It looks upon the totality of its experience the same way we look upon those illusions *we know to be illusions*—like the Müller-Lyer illusion when we ourselves have drawn the lines, or the *trompe l'oeil* which we have inspected close up—with an attitude of circumspection.

The later Mādhyamika philosopher Śāntideva (*c.*690 CE) develops the idea. He continues the tradition of claiming that the Buddha's words are to be understood therapeutically:

> The Lord gave instruction in terms of ordinary things so that people be brought across.
>
> (BCA 9.7ab)[32]

What about our old worry, that this led him to say things that are false by his own lights, for example that ordinary things are not impermanent? Śāntideva's answer is that the Buddha understood better than anyone the resources of ordinary speech, and knew in particular that conventional

[31] Satkari Mookerjee: 'The Vedāntist would shake hands in friendship with the followers of Nāgārjuna if they affirm the reality of a spiritual Absolute as the background behind the enigmatic appearance of the world of plurality.' See his 'The absolutist's standpoint in logic', *Nava-Nalanda-Mahavihara Research Publication*, vol. 1, pp. 1–175; p. 147. See also chapter 7 of this book, and Appendix A. Saṅkara is sometimes described as an *iva-vādin*, because of his frequent assertion that experience is *as if* of ordinary physical objects; it *really* is an illusion.

[32] Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, ed. P. L. Vaidya, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts Series 12 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960). For a complete translation: Kate Crosby and Andrew Skilton, *Bodhicaryāvatāra,* Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

notions can be resisted only by means of conventional notions (just as illusion must be fought with illusion; see chapter 3):

If it be objected that these things, being merely conventional, are not in reality momentary, [we answer that] there is nothing wrong in the use of conventional [words and ideas] by the yogīs, they who have a better vision than ordinary people ... Merit comes from a conqueror who resembles an illusion (*māyopamāt*) just as it would if he were truly existent.

(9.7cd–9.9ab)

In the opening ślokas of the chapter Śāntideva has already explained the distinction between conventional and ultimate truth by way of an analogy with the distinction between veridical experience and illusion, and he has introduced us to the idea that there is a corresponding hierarchy of levels of accomplishment on the path towards the transformation of mind:

It is for the sake of proper understanding that the Sage taught this entire collection. So one should cultivate proper understanding with an appetite to end suffering. It is agreed that there are these two truths: the conventional and the ultimate. Reality is beyond the reach of thinking. Thinking is what the conventional is called. In the light of this, people are seen to be of two types: namely, the spiritually cultivated (*yogin*) and the uncultivated. Of these, the 'world' inhabited by the uncultivated is contradicted by the 'world' inhabited by the cultivated. Even the cultivated are contradicted by the superior understanding of those at successively higher levels, [this we establish] by means of an example (*dṛṣṭānta*), something that is accepted by both parties, irrespective of what they are trying to prove. [The example is:] Things are perceived by ordinary people, and are also thought of as real, not as like an illusion. It is in this regard that there is disagreement between the ordinary person and the cultivated.

(9.1–5)

The disagreement Śāntideva refers to is over the status of ordinary experience. Naïvely, one takes it at face value, as making directly present a world of objects, but someone who has achieved a more refined view assumes an attitude of distance and detachment from ordinary experience. It is to be regarded with as much suspicion as, in the ordinary course of events, one regards an identified illusion or an hallucination. It is not given any weight.

Śāntideva does not say that ordinary experience *really* is illusory;[33] he puts forward the comparison as an illustration and analogy. Nor is there any implication in Śāntideva that one can escape into an altogether different experience, in which, for example, one apprehends directly the unity and simplicity of the world. In other words, these verses give no support to either the Absolutist or the Nihilist interpretation of Madhyamaka.[34] What is the alternative? It is that ordinary experience is seen as something with respect to which the transformed person has altered their attitude. They no longer simply partake of the experience; their interaction is now better described as one of 'internal exile'.[35] Continuing to act and speak as if ordinary experience is to be taken at face value, they are, nevertheless, play-acting and play-speaking. It is a fact of life that experience *seems* to present a world: what one can do is to refuse to give it any ethical weight, to take it seriously. For then, it cannot cause one to suffer. In the context of an attempt to lead such a life, the truth that there is neither self nor no self has a conditional but not merely instrumental value: it helps to maintain the transformed frame of mind.

To sum up. The definitive truth, as extracted from the Buddha's own words by a Mādhyamika hermeneutical procedure, is that concepts *purport* to represent (but fail actually to do so), that the conventional is the domain

[33] Śāntideva's interpreter Prajñākaramati is clear on this point, distinguishing carefully between the 'inter-subjective' and the merely illusory (see below, chapter 6). The two 'truths' are not two levels of reality, but two ways of thinking about a single reality (one much better than the other). Phillis Granoff observes that Śrīharṣa understands the matter the same way: see her *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrīharṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 84–5; see also below, chapter 5.

[34] For reviews of Western interpretations of Madhyamaka: Andrew P. Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); David Burton, *Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 1999). The interpretation I am advancing here has points of commonality with the reading C. W. Huntington offers in 'The system of the two truths in the *Prasannapadā* and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*: a study in Mādhyamika soteriology', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 11 (1983): 77–106. Huntington concludes: 'Unlike either a strictly rational philosophy or a metaphysical system, the Mādhyamika does not seem to be preoccupied with sophisticated epistemological or ontological explanations of reality. On the contrary, the dialectic is apparently designed to expose the meaninglessness of any such attempts at explanation, and in doing so, to "make propaganda" for a style of thinking that should lead to a conception of ultimate truth as *duḥkha-nirodha*, or the cessation of suffering, by altering one's attitude towards everyday experience in this world.'

[35] 'Internal exile' is a phrase used to describe the state of those who choose to remain in an occupied country rather than flee, but live there as if in exile. The poet Erich Kaumistner described himself as living in internal exile in Nazi Germany, refusing to say or do anything that implied approval of the Third Reich. Other dissidents wondered to what extent it is possible not to compromise one's authenticity in such a state.

in which concepts are treated as if they do represent (although in fact they do not), and that although it is impossible to eliminate the purport unless one ceases altogether to be, it is possible to recognize it for what it is and thereby achieve an attitude of circumspection and cognitive distance. This is neither transcendence nor acquiescence, but *an internal exile of the mind*.

5

Words That Break: Can an Upaniṣad State the Truth?

Twofold, verily, is this, there is no third, viz. truth (*satya*) and untruth (*anṛta*). Therefore in saying 'I now enter from untruth to truth', he passes from the men to the gods. Let him then only speak what is true.

Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 1.1.1.4–5a

The oblique path—it was called the 'path to truth'.

Nietzsche

In the work of thinkers belonging to the school of Advaita Vedānta, attention is given to a problem importantly related to the question we have been considering, the question of how authors of protreptic texts intend them to be read or received. The problem refers to an apparent contradiction between vehicle and content. If the Upaniṣads really do say, as the Advaitins claim, that it is erroneous to conceive of the world as a diversity, that all difference is an illusion, then they themselves must be illusions too; but if the Upaniṣads are *illusions*, they can *say* nothing.[1] And, indeed, it's not hard to find Upaniṣadic passages seeming to say exactly that:

With the mind alone must one behold it:
There is here[2] nothing diverse at all!

[1] The problem does not arise in quite this form on the Mādhyamika view that there is only an analogy, and not a strict identity.

[2] *neha nānāsti kiṃcana*. The preceding verse speaks of 'the breathing behind breathing, the sight behind sight', which would suggest that the reference of 'here' is the self or brahman. Advaitins construe it as referring to the whole world. Formally, then, the argument that this verse proves the Advaita claim suffers from *petitio principii*, for it requires us to know in advance that the whole world is identical with brahman. The *iha* 'here' in BU 4.4.19 seems to me an excellent example of the phenomenon Aloka Parasher-Sen describes in terms of 'texts within which were left open spaces for interpretation'. See my Preface.

> From death to death he goes who sees
> Here any kind of diversity.
>
> (BU 4.4.19)

To the allegation of performative incoherence, Maṇḍanamiśra (*c*.675–725 CE), on behalf of the Advaita position, responds with a defence of what I will call the *procedural* use of reason. Reason, it is argued, is able to sustain the inquiry even of an inquirer who is in a position of massive error (or global concealment of the truth as we might more felicitously put it). The running theme of this book has had to do with the identification of deep errors in one's thinking about self, as well as with the proper methods for their removal. The Advaitins locate the deep error in a false conception of the individuation of selves; the Buddhists in the very application of the concept of self. Maṇḍana argues that reason does afford a 'way out' even from within. We will see, however, that a strong critique of procedural reason is presented in the work of two other philosophers, Kumārila and Rāmānuja.

5.1 False vehicle, true content: Maṇḍanamiśra's examples

I begin with the following question. What is it that makes reasoning something of value, a virtue? One answer, indeed the standard one, is that reasoning is valuable because truth is preserved or transmitted across arguments. If truth-preservation is what makes reasoning valuable, then reason's proper interest is in the shared properties of truth-preserving arguments, in other words, in validity as a formal property of argument-schemes. In some quarters of the Indian debate, however, there is a persistent demand to locate the virtue in a different property of reason—argument should not merely *preserve* truth but also *promote* it. One advocate of that view is Maṇḍanamiśra, the influential early Advaita Vedāntin.[3] Maṇḍanamiśra wants reason to extract or filter the true from the false.

[3] His career was in Mīmāṃsā, and he is the author of several important Mīmāṃsā texts, including the *Bhāvaviveka* and the *Vidhiviveka,* upon which the polymath Vācaspatimiśra wrote his *Nyāyakaṇikā.* Vācaspati also wrote a commentary, now lost, on the *Brahmasiddhi*, and attempted a harmonization of Maṇḍana and Śaṅkara. See A. W. Thrasher, *The Advaita Vedānta of Brahma-siddhi* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993). Hajime Nakamura suggests that in the earlier phase of Advaita 'he seems to have been a Vedānta scholar equal in authority to Śaṅkara'. Hajime Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Part 2, 2004), p. 189.

Indeed, Maṇḍanamiśra raises a question of outstanding epistemological importance, one that is pressing not only for the adherents of Advaita Vedānta, but for all philosophers who share with them a certain conception of the ends of philosophy. I believe that we can learn a great deal about the nature of epistemological inquiry from a careful examination of Maṇḍana's argument. I hope, in particular, to show how a procedural or algorithmic conception of inquiry is importantly different from more commonplace epistemological theories. Maṇḍanamiśra begins with what is a familiar puzzle. If the Upaniṣads and other Vedāntic texts teach that all is in reality a single, simple unity, and that the apparent world of plurality and difference is an illusion of the senses,[4] then those texts themselves, as an articulated part of the apparent world of differences, are illusory too. In that case, their testimony is not dependable. In other words, the assertions of the Upaniṣads are pragmatically self-defeating: their truth undermines the warrant they afford for believing it. To this common charge, Maṇḍana responds as follows:

Some people say that a belief in the Vedānta undermines itself (*svayam eva vyāhata*). Without difference, [they say] one cannot understand difference, for it is comprehended precisely by means of difference; and so it is self-defeating to say that non-difference is understood insofar as difference is eliminated.

We reject this argument. The acquisition of knowledge requires that there is a method, but not that the method is 'real in itself' (*paramārtha*). For the truth can be known even by way of an erroneous belief (*mithyājñānād api tattva-pratipatteḥ*).

(BS p. 41, l. 11–15)[5]

How might someone come to acquire knowledge of *brahman*, when that knowledge consists precisely in a recognition that there is no such thing as difference, that all is one? It will seem that the only effective procedure in the acquisition of such knowledge takes at face value the teachings of the scriptures, specifically here the Upaniṣads as they are interpreted by Śaṅkara and the followers of his school of Advaita Vedānta.[6] Yet—and here we find

[4] Or, if one thinks that the senses present only raw particulars and no differences, as indeed Maṇḍana does (BS p. 71, l. 1–2), then the illusion is a product of the mental constructions one puts upon the raw perceptual data.

[5] Page and line numbers refer to the following edition: *Brahmasiddhi by Maṇḍanamiśra, with Śaṅkhapāṇi's commentary*, ed. S. Kuppuswami Sastri (Madras Government Oriental Manuscripts Series, no. 4, 1937).

[6] As I have noted earlier in this book, this is not the only possible interpretation of the Upaniṣads. The puzzle we are considering is one that is internal to Advaita Vedānta.

ourselves in a dilemma—we must admit either that those various Upaniṣads do really exist, each with its various stanzas, each one of which is composed of words, words themselves composed of syllables, and so that there are real differences; or, if not, then we must admit that the person seeking to acquire knowledge of *brahman* has at least to *believe* that the recited Upaniṣads exist in a structured form capable of giving testimony, and so that a false belief is necessarily implicated in the procedure that leads to knowledge.

The first option is what motivates the charge against Advaita Vedānta of self-refutation: the method by which the so-called 'knowledge' is produced requires for its possibility the negation of what is claimed as true. This is, we might observe, a peculiar inversion of Kant's transcendental method of proof, under which the truth of a certain proposition, for instance the existence of space, is argued to be a condition on the possibility of experience. Here we have what might be termed a transcendental method of *refutation*, in which the truth of a proposition *not-p* is argued to be a condition on the possibility of the belief that *p*.[7] It is important to observe that it does not follow from such a method of argumentation that *p* is false: what does follow is that knowledge of *p* is impossible. For either we do believe that *p*, in which case *p* is false, or else *p* is true and we cannot believe it. What we cannot have is a *true belief* in the proposition.[8]

It is for good reason, then, that Maṇḍana chooses to defend the second horn of the dilemma. False belief, he claims, can be instrumentally implicated in the manufacture of knowledge.[9] The 'source text'[10] for that claim is ¯Iśā Upaniṣad 11:

Truth (*vidyā*) and error (*avidyā*)—he who knows them both together passes beyond death by untruth, and by truth attains immortality.

[7] One might recall here the idea of a preparatory condition, introduced in chapter 1.

[8] For an interesting study of the role of transcendental methods of argumentation in Indian epistemology, see Dan Arnold, *Buddhists, Brahmans, and Belief: Epistemology in South Asian Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

[9] This thesis is explicitly denied by many classical and contemporary epistemologists. Gail Fine, for instance, uses *Meno* 75 c8–d7 to attribute to Plato the view that 'knowledge must be based on knowledge'; see her *Plato on Knowledge and Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 226ff. See also Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 78: '[A] true belief essentially based on false beliefs does not constitute knowledge.' It is denied too by those who espouse a 'no false lemmas' condition on knowledge; see Gilbert Harman, *Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

[10] I prefer 'source text' to 'proof text' here, for reasons indicated in the Preface. With one exception, our authors do not cite the early texts as proof of their views, but as evidence that the view is consistent with the tradition. The exception, of course, is if the claim being made concerns the text itself.

Maṇḍana explains:

The two, truth and error, are related in a means-ends relation. Without error, there is no means to truth.

(BS p. 13, l. 5–6)

In the course of explaining Īśā Upaniṣad 11, Maṇḍana advances two distinct accounts of how it might be that error is instrumental in the pursuit of knowledge.[11] I shall call his two accounts the 'residue' theory and the 'immanence' theory. The residue theory claims that certain false beliefs have a particular causal capacity, the capacity to destroy other false beliefs and then to annihilate themselves. Maṇḍana offers, by way of analogy, the power of certain chemicals to dissolve other chemicals before dissolving themselves, or again antidotes, which eliminate other poisons in the body before themselves disappearing. What remains as a residue is the truth:

Truly then, nothing that is brought into being lasts for ever, and so he said 'by error, death.' What this means is not that error is the method of establishing the truth, but rather that error is also destroyed by means of the error whose mark is hearing, for example, [the recited Upaniṣads]. So error is said to be death.

(BS p. 13, l. 6–8)

Error, in other words, kills itself; or rather, one error kills all. In the last chapter, we looked at two examples of a residue theory: the Buddha, in likening his own teachings to an emetic, put forward a residue theory; and so did Āryadeva, when he said that false beliefs 'burn up' false beliefs, including themselves. Maṇḍana, however, does not endorse this theory, and perhaps for good reason. For, after all, it rests on the optimistic idea that error has an innate dispositional tendency towards mutual annihilation and self-destruction, and that leaves it vulnerable to the objection that it leaves no room for a normative truth-seeking practice. It requires of us only that we wait around for error to blow itself up and so fails to give determinate

[11] As with comparable terms in Greek, the word *asatya*, a derivative of the verb *as* 'to be', connotes both untruth and unreality. Thus to say that the Upaniṣads are *asatya* is to assert any one of three things: that they are unreal, that the belief in them is untrue, and that they are real but what they say is false. This vehicle-content distinction will become important later. Similar care must be taken with other Sanskrit synonyms for 'error', such as *avidyā*. For detailed discussion of Maṇḍana's theory of error: Lampert Schmithausen, *Maṇḍanamiśras Vibhramavivekaḥ, mit einer Studie zur Entwicklung der indischen Irrtumslehre* (Vienna: Hermann Bohlaus, 1965); Srinivasa Rao, *Perceptual Error: The Indian Theories* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 103–8.

shape to a *quest* for truth. An analogous criticism has been pressed against the conception of political practice in Marxism, which sees capitalism as already containing the seeds of its own destruction, a conception that leaves the political practitioner with no more than an ancillary role in the struggle for political change.[12]

The immanence theory claims instead that knowledge is immanent in error:

Another meaning [of Īśā Up. 11]—There is no error without some truth. Even a perception of difference is not devoid of illumination, for in its absence no difference is illuminated ... The truth whose mark is hearing [the Upaniṣads speak] about oneness is not free of error, for it is bound up with such distinctions as exist between hearer and hearing, and so on.

(BS p. 13, 11–17)

That is to say, even within error, there is an embedded truth; the presence of truth is a precondition for the possibility of error. And if indeed there is truth 'in' error, then one way to make sense of the idea that error can lead to truth is to think that the element of truth that is immanent in a false belief might be in some way *operative* in guiding the believer from error to truth. Maṇḍana explores this idea in the continuation of the passage we have been examining on Īśā Up. 11. Later in the *Brahmasiddhi*, he will explore another possibility, that a corrective procedure can extract the truth that lies within an error. Proceeding first with the idea that it is the true ingredient in a false belief which is operative in the manufacture of further beliefs, Maṇḍana introduces a series of famous examples (not all his own):

[Objection:] If all is one, then diversity is false, and so reflection upon it and hearing about it are false too. So how can they take place, and to what effect? Moreover, an apprehension of what is true derived from the false is in fact an error (*asatyāc ca satya-pratipattir mithyaiva*). An example is the apprehension of smoke as a result of fog misperceived.

[Reply:] There is no law that what is untrue can have no effect. Magic tricks cause fear and delight. The false can produce something true. Here are two

[12] So argues the political theorist G. A. Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); see also Thomas Nagel, *Concealment and Exposure, and Other Essays* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), p. 109. Ironically, Marx himself seems to have been sceptical about the therapeutic philosophy of the ancients for similar reasons; see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 36–8.

examples: a drawing of a *gavaya* [which shows us what this cow-like animal looks like, but isn't itself one], and written letters [which show us the corresponding sound, but don't make it].

[Objection:] In and of themselves, these things are real, not void; but those who think that all is one hold that the means of reaching the truth are in and of themselves false.

[Reply:] In and of themselves, they are real, but as *signs* they are false. [They pretend to be something they are not.]

[...]

[Objection:] A drawing of a *gavaya* doesn't cause one to apprehend [itself, which is] something other than a *gavaya* as a *gavaya*; nor written letters the sounds. Rather, it is through resemblance: 'This [drawing] is like a *gavaya*!' And the letters work through the convention, 'Seeing this written letter, one should recall this sound.' [So there is no falsity involved here at all.]

[Reply:] That contradicts everyday opinion. A child is taught the written letters as *being* sounds, and in ordinary life no difference between them mentioned. Someone says, 'This is a *gavaya,*' and the listener replies, 'I have seen a *gavaya*.'

Furthermore, it is not a mistake to infer that a reflected object is at a particular place, on the basis of a reflection, which [being a reflection] is untrue. It is not a mistake to understand a particular meaning from words which, though really eternal, are falsely broken into long and short syllables.

Again, an imaginary snakebite can be the cause of death, and it is no mistake to deduce the death from it, any more than from a real snakebite happening at a particular place and time.

(BS p. 13, l. 19–p. 14, l. 15)

What Maṇḍana is trying to do here is to show how something that is illusory, phoney, or fake can nevertheless be instrumental in the production of knowledge. The drawing of an animal can instruct us in the shape of the real thing; letters written in a phonetic script can serve to indicate the sound of the pronounced word. The respondent points out that, for a proper analogy with the alleged status of the Upaniṣads, we must have a case in which an unreal vehicle of representation is falsely believed to be real, and the content represented believed to be true (cf. my note above about the term *asatya*). The examples of the written letters and the drawing seem, on the other hand, to be cases where the vehicle is real, but the content false. Maṇḍana suggests that there is in each of these cases an element of untruth—we do in some way identify the sign with the signified, the picture with the real thing. I point at someone's picture, and say, 'That

is her!' He seems to think that these cases are assimilable to the category of the illusion, claiming that in both cases we suffer under an illusion to the effect that the drawing is really the animal, or the written letters really are the word. These two cases were ones that other Indian philosophers had already used and discussed.[13] In the event that this defence of them as proper examples is not found convincing, Maṇḍana tries two more, the cases of the phoney snakebite and the reflection. These do seem to have a better claim to be cases where an unreal vehicle is believed to bear a true content.

Yet there remains an ambiguity in Maṇḍana's description and it is one upon which he trades. Does he suppose that we are conscious that the image is only an image, the drawing only a drawing; or does he take it that we really are victims of a deception? The example of the person who, mistakenly thinking they have been bitten by a snake, nevertheless falls into a swoon and dies, suggests that the examples are meant to be regarded in the second way, as does Maṇḍana's insistence on the identity of sign and signified. The problem with that is that there is no general reason to suppose that the victim of such a deception is going to be led towards the truth, rather than further into error. Someone who does not realize that the object they see before them is only a reflection will not go in the right direction, any more than the person who really does think that the line-drawing is the animal. It would seem from these examples that error does lead to truth, but only when it is in some sense *recognized* as error. The prisoners in Plato's cave could indeed learn quite a lot about the real world by observing the shadows, but only if they have come to recognize the shadows *as* shadows.[14] If it is philosophy that is to be their guide, then we must ask: to what extent can this reorientation be the product of the application of reason?

[13] The case of the written letters is to be found in Kumārila, *Ślokavārttika* 5.3.155–9; and in Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* under 2.1.14, but without elaboration. Śaṅkara also mentions the case of the phoney snakebite. Compare also Śaṅkara 4.1.3: the Vedic texts are indeed unreal.

[14] J. L. Austin argues that ordinary reflected images should not even be described as illusions: 'No doubt you *can* produce illusions with mirrors, suitably disposed. But is just *any* case of seeing something in a mirror an illusion, as he [Ayer] implies? Quite obviously not. For seeing things in mirrors is a perfectly normal occurrence, completely familiar, and there is usually no question of anyone being taken in.' *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 26.

5.2 Of fire, fog and fallacy: Śrīharṣa meets Gettier

The example of a person who mistakes fog for smoke, and then infers to the presence of fire, is an important one in Indian epistemology. It too looks at first sight to be a case where a real vehicle (the fog) represents falsely, but might also be described as a case in which an unreal vehicle (the illusion that there is smoke) represents truly. Its first appearance in the Indian literature seems to have been with the Vaiśeṣika philosopher Praśastapāda (*c.*530 CE). He uses it to illustrate a particular sort of inferential error, one he calls *tadbhāvāsiddha* 'unestablished as is'. Exemplifying this sort with the case of someone who, 'while alluding to fog, wishes to prove the presence of fire from that of smoke', Praśastapāda says that the evidence is 'not established as having the form of smoke'.[15] Unfortunately, he does not elaborate on, or formally define, the fallacy. The same example, however, is also known to several later philosophers, including two of Maṇḍana's time, the Buddhist Dharmakīrti (*c.*600–660 CE) and the Mīmāṃsaka philosopher Kumārila (*c.*640 CE), as well as later Vedāntins including Śrīharṣa (*c.*1125–1180 CE).[16]

Kumārila says that 'the truth is not reached by way of what has only the appearance of truth' (ŚV 5.3.159), and he relates this point to any attempt to derive an 'ultimate truth' (*paramārtha-satya*) from the merely 'worldly truth' (*saṃvṛti-satya*); this latter, he also argues, is just another name for the false in any system that postulates 'two truths'. I will discuss Kumārila's view in more detail later in this chapter.

Dharmakīrti uses the example slightly differently. He thinks about a situation in which one is simply not sure if one is seeing smoke or fog, and nevertheless attempts to infer that there is fire. The attempt will fail, because there is a confusion with respect to the nature as 'its own' (*svayam*) of the evidence. I take it that he thinks this is so even if it is *in fact* smoke that one is perceiving. That seems, at least, to be the force of his comment:

[15] *Praśastapādabhāṣya* [PB], §270: *tadbhāvāsiddho yathā dhūmabhāvenāgnyadhigatau kartavyāyām upanyasyamāno bāṣpo dhūmabhāvenāsiddha iti*. I use the enumeration of the text in Johannes Bronkhorst and Yves Ramseier, *Word Index to the Praśastapādabhāṣya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994). They note that this sentence is omitted in two of the twelve editions of the text they survey; a proper examination of the mss. is required conclusively to determine that it is not a later interpolation.

[16] Exact chronology is difficult, but Dharmakīrti, Kumārila and Maṇḍana fall in roughly the same century. Legend has it that Maṇḍana was Kumārila's brother-in-law and pupil; but this is doubtful. For a survey of the available facts: Thrasher, *The Advaita-Vedānta of the Brahma-siddhi*, Appendix A. The dates for Śrīharṣa follow Granoff (below).

As for instance, [adducing] a general material thing, covered with the form of fog or whatever, in proving fire.

(NB 3.73)[17]

Although the passive of the verb *sandih-* 'to cover, to smear' can mean either 'to be confused' or 'to be confounded, mistaken', and so could just conceivably refer both to the case of *mistaken* identification and to the case of *indefinite* identification, the commentators take it to refer only to the latter. If the person is unsure whether it is indeed smoke they are seeing, and nevertheless goes ahead (insofar as that is possible) and attempts to infer the presence of fire, then that is an inferential error.[18]

Śrīharṣa's discussion, is, however, of a different order of sophistication. He emphasizes the fact that the conclusion might well be both true and the result of an apparently well-attested process of knowledge-formation, namely rational inference. He sees this as causing difficulties for the most influential theory of knowledge (Udayana's). In a passage of crucial importance, he first of all considers the case of a belief[19] that is true by chance:

The definition of knowledge (*pramā*) as a non-mnemonic committal mental state or episode (*anubhava*) of the way things are (*tattva*) over-extends and covers beliefs which are true but [purely by chance], as in the maxim of 'the crow and the palm tree.'[20]

Another example: someone, closing five shells in his palm, asks, 'How many shells are there?' The person who has been asked the question says, 'five,' as per the

[17] *yathā bāṣpādi-bhāvena sandihyamāno bhūtasaṃghāto 'gnisiddhāv upadiśyamānaḥ sandigdhāsiddhaḥ*. P. Peterson (ed.), *The Nyāyabinduṭīkā of Dharmottara to which is added the Nyāyabindu* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1889), p. 112.

[18] Bhāsarvajña (*c.* 950 CE) too, describing the case as a 'fallacy due to uncertainty' (*sandigdhāsiddha*), says that it involves an indefinite discrimination. *Nyāyasāra with Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*, ed. Yogindrananda (Varanasi: Ministry of Education, 1968), p. 312.

[19] It is with caution that I sometimes use the word 'belief' as a substitute for terms like *jñāna*. Indian ontology of the mind is not accurately described in terms of the notion of belief, if that implies standing dispositional states of mind. It would be more strictly accurate to talk consistently about 'mental episodes' or 'cognitions' or 'apprehensions'. Too much precision of that sort, however, leads quickly to unreadability, and is necessary only in contexts where the distinction matters. There are also those who deny we should use the term 'knowledge' in describing the Indian theory (but then, we might ask, 'the theory of what?'); and, as is well known, there have even been those who have said the same about the term 'philosophy' itself. Translations of words are like machine components: both have tolerance margins.

[20] A popular maxim, illustrating inexplicable coincidence: the crow alights in a palm tree at just the moment when its ripe fruit happens to fall, killing the crow. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams, Illusion, and Other Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 265–8.

maxim of 'the goat and the sword.'[21] Then both the speaker and the respondent think that there are five shells.

Instances such as this are there to be seen. The expression 'the way things are' can't rule out this belief (*jñāna*), because there is no lack of accordance: the number five circumscribes what is actually the case.

Nor is it ruled out by the expression *anubhava* [implying *not a memory*], for it does not come after another such state, so the defining mark of recollection is not present.

Nor can they say that what results is just a doubt (*saṃśaya*: *p* or *not-p*?), lacking in commitment (*niścaya*), with only one side of the doubt articulated for the same reason that one finds in the practice of cultivation [one sows the seeds, uncertain but assertive that they will grow]. That's because there must be only a pretence of certainty in one of the two sides of the doubt; for otherwise, we would make the mistake of thinking that a doubt is the conjunction of two certainties [*p* and *not-p*!].

Perhaps what is needed is a qualification [in the definition], to the effect that knowledge must be produced by such a cause as is 'faithful' (*avyabhicāri*; nondeviant). That can't be right, though, for it would make the expression 'the way things are' superfluous. If one wants to maintain that the belief that is as per 'the crow and the palm tree' is produced by a complex of causes that are collectively 'unfaithful', the unwelcome result would be that even the 'unfaithful' is true (*yathārtha*), because there is [still] no distinction among the causes [of the true].

Nor can it be right to say that this 'accordance with how things are' is without any cause, for in the absence of any restricting principle (*niyāmaka*) there would be a serious over-extension [of the definition]. So, given that this 'faithfulness' is needed, one has to say that the instrumental cause [of knowledge] is indeed subject to a principle of restriction to what is 'faithful'.

'So what is then [this restriction to what is "faithful"]?' You must give an answer to this question yourself, an answer that shows either how to include this [luckily true] belief within the [somehow] restricted domains of knowledge, or else how to delimit the general definition of knowledge.[22]

The possibility of the true guess seems to show that 'true awareness' or 'true belief' alone is not sufficient for knowledge. Adding the further

[21] Another popular maxim, illustrating an action's accidental and unintended effects: the sword is accidentally dislodged by the goat's rubbing against the post on which it is balanced; it falls and cuts the goat's throat. See Doniger O'Flaherty, *Dreams*, p. 266.

[22] Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. B. Dvivedi (ed.), with Śiromaṇi's *Bhūṣāmaṇi* (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1990), book 1, chapter 16: pp. 241–4. See Stephen H. Phillips, *Classical Indian Metaphysics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 164–73, for selected passages from chapters 17 and 20–2.

condition, 'produced by a faithful cause' seems promising, but there are serious difficulties with the proposal. If it is meant to introduce a distinction *among* the causes of true mental states, so that we can say of some that they are not caused in the right way, then we cannot define a 'faithful' cause simply as one such as to produce as true beliefs. This is Śrīharṣa's challenge to traditional Indian theories of knowledge. It presented the tradition with a considerable difficulty, and would contribute to the emergence of a new Indian epistemology, the Navya Nyāya.[23]

Śrīharṣa goes on to argue that chance can be involved even when the belief is the result of one of the standardly approved sources of knowledge. The text continues as follows:

So too, it is possible that what merely appears to be the sign leads to an ascertainment of the signified in a place where, as chance would have it, the signified is present, either alone or with the sign. And there, even if as regards the mere appearance of the sign there is no knowledge (*pramā*), nor as regards the place it is located with the signified, nevertheless, as thus characterised [in the person's mind], the knowledge-hood (*prāmāṇya*) of the ascertainment has to be accepted, with respect to its being about the signified, for example, fire, either on its own or with a different sign. So there is no way to escape the fault [in the theory of knowledge] mentioned above.

Śrīharṣa identifies two places where a defect has crept into the inferential process: the person has misidentified the evidence, taking what is in fact fog to be smoke; and they have also misascribed it to the mountain, for there isn't (necessarily) any smoke on the mountain. The misascription is, of

[23] In an earlier book, I suggested that the new solution is to say that the restricted causal principle is 'normal functioning of a process of such a type as generates true beliefs in normal conditions'. In a review, Stephen Phillips argued that this will not do. His reason was that the additional causal principle *is* truth-entailing, but 'generates true beliefs in normal conditions' is not. The full statement of the principle I offered is, as a matter of fact, truth-entailing (I was not, however, sufficiently clear in my earlier book that this is the principle to which the token use of the term *pramāṇa* should attach; Indians do also use the term to refer to the type itself). More recently, Phillips has said that '[a] cognition that was only accidentally truth-hitting in a certain instance would belong to a type that could not be relied on'. I think that we are now in agreement, but the problem remains, to answer the question Śrīharṣa says needs answering: What is the principle of typing, the 'restricting principle' (*niyāmaka*)? Gaṅgeśa, on whom Phillips bases his remarks, has a quite strange view: he defines 'knowledge' as any true mental episode, but he seems to be using the term in a technical sense (see n. 24). See my *Semantic Powers: Meaning and the Means of Knowing in Classical Indian Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999b), pp. 63–72; Stephen Phillips, 'Review of Ganeri', *Mind* 110 (2001): 749–53; and 'Introduction' to Stephen H. Phillips and N. S. Ramanuja Tatacharya (trans.), *Epistemology of Perception: Gaṅgeśa's Tattvacintāmaṇi* (New York: American Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2004), pp. 10, 183–6. See also Patrik Nyman, 'On the meaning of *yathārtha*', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33 (2005): 553–70.

course, a consequence of the misidentification: once the fog is mistaken for smoke, then whatever is believed to be true of the fog will be taken to be a truth about the smoke. Still, the two beliefs, that *this* is smoke, and that there is smoke on the mountain, are distinct; and both are mistaken. Given the second belief as premise, it would indeed be rational to infer to the presence of fire, and, *by chance*, Śrīharṣa says, there is indeed fire on the mountain. In his sceptical persona, Śrīharṣa does not assert that the inference does not in fact lead to knowledge; his point is that the epistemological theory under discussion cannot agree that it is knowledge, and so the theory is defeated *on its own terms*. Śrīharṣa, indeed, thinks this is true of *all* theories of knowledge; he claims only to use others' epistemological criteria against themselves.[24]

Do we have in Śrīharṣa, or in the other philosophers I have just mentioned, an anticipation of Edmund Gettier?[25] Gettier's examples seem to show the justification of a true item (state, episode, event, condition) of the mind is not sufficient for that item to be knowledge. In Gettier's cases there is a disconnection between the circumstances that make for truth and the circumstances that make for justification: I have a false but justified belief that Jones owns a Ford, and a true and justified belief that Jones either owns a Ford or is in Barcelona (he drives by in a borrowed car on the way to the airport). To some, it has seemed that what these cases show is that knowledge cannot rest on a 'false lemma'.[26] I infer that Jones either owns a Ford or is in Barcelona from the false lemma, namely, that Jones

[24] For further discussion of this last point: Phyllis Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrīharṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 4–30, 144–6. Matilal argues, following Gaṅgeśa, that the mistaken inferrer does know, but does not know that he knows (*Perception*, pp. 137–40). He does know, because 'know' is used by Gaṅgeśa in the technical sense of any 'truth-hitting cognitive episode'. He does not know that he knows because 'his inference, his evidential support, has not been faultless'. This does not, however, really address the problem: first, because our interest is not in any technical use of 'know' but in our actual concept of knowledge; and more particularly because, if we are using the technical definition, we must use it for 'knowledge of knowledge' too; but there is no reason why the mistaken inferrer should not cognize truly that he has a true cognition.

[25] Edmund Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge', *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121–3. The question was first raised by B. K. Matilal, *Perception*, pp. 135–6. See also Sukharanjan Saha, *Epistemology in Pracīna and Navya Nyāya* (Kolkata: Jadavpur University, 2003), pp. 59–70, as well as my 'Review of Saha', *Philosophy East and West* 57.1 (2007), p. 120–3.

[26] Gilbert Harman, 'Knowledge, inference and explanation', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 5 (1968): 164–73 at p. 164. See also his *Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973). Harman notes that there are purely perceptual Gettier cases, such as when it looks to one as if there is a candle in front of one, an appearance which, though veridical, is caused by a reflection in an intervening mirror. Harman concludes that all perception involves inference.

owns a Ford. It is not entirely clear, however, if any of the Indian theories operate with a notion of justification that would entitle us to call one of the above examples a 'Gettier case', although they certainly have the form of a counter-example to the sufficiency of an analysis of knowledge. The Indians do not typically say that what these examples show is that I am in an inferentially justified and coincidentally true mental state. What they say is that I have *tried* to infer, but have done so unsuccessfully. There has been, as we might say, a 'performative misfire' in my attempted act of coming to know. The notion of a 'performative misfire' is due to J. L. Austin.[27] He says a couple might go through all the motions of getting married, but fail to do so for various reasons. One reason, which he calls a *misinvocation* of the ceremony, is simply that one of the couple is already married, and so it is impossible for the performance to succeed, however well it is otherwise conducted. It might even be the case that both parties think, mistakenly, that the performance has been successful (the member of the couple who is already married wrongly believing, for example, that the old marriage has been annulled). That is how the 'fire-fog' case will be described—there is an attempt at the performance of an inference, an attempt that fails because the person involved mistakenly thinks that a condition on the successful performance of the inference has been met, whereas in fact it has not (the condition here being the one identified by Śrīharṣa, that there is smoke on the mountain). The 'ceremony' of inference has been misinvoked.[28]

That works for Praśastapāda, but still leaves Dharmakīrti. In his example, the condition *is* met (or at least could be): the problem is that the person doing the inferring *isn't sure* whether it is met or not. So another condition on inferential success is needed: that a person attempting an inference ascertain that all the conditions on successful inference are met. The inferential failure involved in Dharmakīrti's example is what Austin calls an *abuse*. One can't sincerely go through the ceremony of marriage if one is unsure whether one is already married or not.

There is, however, a danger for those philosophers, Praśastapāda and Dharmakīrti included, who want to classify all such cases as ones of inferential failure. The danger is that the criterion chosen to exclude them will be *too draconian*, and end up wrongly excluding plenty of perfectly

[27] J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1975), pp. 14–18.

[28] I develop the 'infelicities' approach to the study of logic and epistemology in a work in progress, *Knowing as an Act of Mind*.

viable cases of inferential success as well. The same danger is there for the 'no false lemmas' theory. If one says, for example, that any uncertainty at all with respect to the evidence is enough to bring about an inferential malfunction, then that would run the risk of excluding the case in which I mistake what is in fact wood smoke for coal smoke, for example. That's surely wrong: I can perfectly well infer to the presence of fire in spite of this mistake. I think we must take seriously Praśastapāda's use of the phrase '*tad-bhāva*', and Dharmakīrti's of '*svayam*'; the implication is that the mistake or uncertainty in question must concern the identification of the thing as 'what it is' or as 'its own'. Mistaking wood smoke for coal smoke is not a misidentification of that sort, but mistaking fog for smoke is.

Perhaps this permits us to reach a better understanding of Maṇḍana's idea that when an element of truth is immanent in an error, the error can lead us to the truth. Consider again, for instance, the example of the image reflected in a mirror. There *is* truth mixed up with error in this reflection, even for the perceiver who does not realize that what they see is merely a reflection. For although the reflection misleads with respect to the location in space of the object reflected, it does not mislead with regard to its shape, colour, and other intrinsic properties—what it is in itself. A person who comes to believe that the object is a green vase has acquired a piece of knowledge *in the midst* of an error. In an analogous way, knowledge of the unity of the cosmos might be acquired in the midst of erroneous belief in the existence of real plurality:

> In and of themselves, the means that lead to an appreciation of non-difference are not in error, for what they are in and of themselves is just brahman. So the means by which one reaches brahman is just brahman, bound up with error. It's just the same with written letters, like 'This is a "*k*"' or 'This is a *gavaya*'—they do make known the sounds even though the form is erroneous.
>
> (BS p. 14, l. 4–6)

Later Buddhists refer to the case in which a fire is being used to cook some meat for an offering. Although the fire has not as yet produced any smoke, the cooking meat attracts a swarm of flies which look from a distance to be a plume of smoke. Examples of this sort suggest that the conditions on performative 'inferential misfire' need to be slackened still further. For what should we say if, as in this example, the circumstances are such as to ensure that the misidentified evidence is necessarily correlated with that which

it is misidentified? It is then not *by chance* that the inferrer hits the truth, even if it involves an element of luck.[29] There is even a circumstance in which the inference-from-fog example will fit this model of operative truth embedded in error. That is the circumstance where the fog is a by-product of the heat of the fire. Now we can, again, say that the truth itself—namely that there is a fire—is guiding the belief that there is a fire, because if there had been no fire, there would have been no fog, no fog misperceived as smoke, and so no inference back to fire. This seems to be an almost exact analogy for what Maṇḍana wants to say is the relation between knowledge of *brahman* or non-difference and an erroneous but instrumentally necessary belief in difference.

5.3 Reasons and causes

Reason demands that when beliefs are in conflict, an adjudication is made. In the Indian texts, one belief is said to have the greater 'strength' (*balatva*). We have been discussing a situation in which the testimony of the Upaniṣads is in conflict with the perceptual evidence of the senses. At the beginning of the chapter in the *Brahmasiddhi* on reasoning (*tarka*), Maṇḍana responds to the objection that here perception, and not scripture, is stronger, because the acquisition of knowledge through testimony 'depends on' (*apekṣā*) prior perception of both words and world (both in hearing the text recited and, before that, in learning the meaning of the words involved in correlation with perceived objects in the world). With admirable clarity, Maṇḍana distinguishes between the notions of *reason* and *cause*, and observes that causal priority does not imply logical or evidential priority:

> Even though dependent on the earlier awareness as its cause, the later awareness is seen to be stronger.
>
> (BS p. 41, 4–5)

Strength is an epistemological notion; the English idiom would speak rather of one cognition 'having greater weight' than another (it is curious that, in

[29] A good discussion of the place of luck in knowledge acquisition is Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

both languages, metaphors of force are used to provide a *contrast* with the causal idiom). Maṇḍana is surely correct both to disentangle the two senses in which cognitions might depend on one another, and to point out that a subsequent cognition can carry greater strength or weight than its necessary causal prerequisites. Of course, this is exactly the situation when error leads to truth. Maṇḍana provides two illustrative examples. In the first, an initial misperception contributes to the the observer's ability to see clearly what is going on. Initially misperceiving the legs of some elephants as posts (or, possibly, tree trunks), one comes to see that there are in fact posts there, albeit far away:

For example, in the case of some distant posts, the awareness that there are posts [is stronger] than the perceptions of elephants, even though the perceptions of the elephants is needed as a cause in the perception of the posts. Sensory connection alone does not produce this perception, because at the first moment it is absent. Nor is it the product of [going to] a particular place, because it arises even when staying put. So, in the case of posts standing at a distance, what one should think is that the mind is focussed and joins the senses in friendship with the mental traces left by the preceding mistake.

(BS p. 41, l. 5–10)

A clearer example, though, is his second one. One becomes aware that there are twenty of something, beginning with an initial awareness that there is one, then two, and so on (BS p. 41, l. 10–11). In the *Sphoṭasiddhi*, Maṇḍana uses this same example to illustrate the process by which the supposedly erroneous perception of individual words leads to a correct grasp of the unitary sentence meaning,[30] and he stresses the importance of temporal sequence. Perhaps the idea is that the initial error is cleared up, not by approaching closer, but by watching carefully over a period of time: the things initially taken to be elephant legs do not move. Temporal sequence as an essential ingredient in a corrective procedure seems also to be the point of the example of numbers. Here, I think, the idea is that one is trying to ascertain the number of objects of a certain sort in a particular place and the process involved is one of counting. One judges 'here is

[30] The discussion here refers to Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīyavṛtti* 1.87–90. Bhartṛhari is a sentence holist, regarding words as fictional abstractions not having a meaning of their own. Sentence meaning is logically prior to word meaning, but the listener must hear the string of individual words first, before grasping the meaning of the sentence.

one', but on noticing a second, corrects one's first judgement with the new judgement 'there are two'; and so on. The process of making and then correcting an error continues until there are no more objects of that sort in the vicinity, at which point one's judgement acquires stability. Provided that the person counting is sufficiently diligent and observant, the process ends with the judgement 'there are twenty' precisely because there are indeed twenty such objects: if there had been another one, it too would have been counted. Presumably this is why the later judgment 'there are twenty' has greater epistemic strength than the earlier judgement 'there are two'—it is stable over time in the mind of a properly attentive person. The example of counting helps to make clear why an initial error should be thought necessary as the means to the ascertainment of truth.

Maṇḍana does not distinguish between two rather different ways to understand the 'error leads to truth' thesis. A stronger reading affirms that error is a necessary step in the path to truth; a weaker version of the thesis will claim only that there are ways to reach the truth given the fact of error. Maṇḍana is, I think, committed only to the weaker reading, for it is his overall purpose to show that the brute fact of our colossal error about the reality of difference is no bar to our coming to know the truth, that all is one. The idea that the truth is immanent in error permits one the hope that a suitably refined and well-attuned corrective procedure will lead from error to truth. Perhaps there is a faint analogy in the scientific method of successive approximation, a process that leads to the truth via a succession of steps, each of which, being only an approximation, is false.[31]

5.4 How to lever oneself into the truth, given the fact of colossal error

Maṇḍana's epistemology is procedural and first-personal. That is to say, he begins with the assumption that each one of us is massively in error,

[31] F. H. Bradley seems to have something akin to a procedural conception in mind when, at the very end of *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 487, he says: 'We want to know, in effect, whether the universe is concealed behind appearances ... And to this, in general, we may make an unhesitating reply. There is no reality at all anywhere except in appearance, and in our appearance we can discover the main nature of reality.' Error, according to Bradley, is partial truth, the result of seeing only some of the whole and from a particular point, rather than seeing them 'from the centre' (p. 172)—the way a Vyāsa might.

and then he seeks to find the resources that each of us has available, by means of which one can 'lever oneself up' into the truth. For the Vedāntin, epistemology is meant to answer the question: how, *from within*, to reach the truth, given the fact[32] of colossal error? This is a legitimate project of inquiry, but it is instructively different from many standard conceptions of the nature of epistemological inquiry (or the role of philosophy in achieving wisdom). It will not fit either into a foundationalist or a coherentist conception. Foundationalism searches for a domain of self-evident truths, as well as for methods to move with certainty from those truths to others. Its way of coping with error is that of Descartes—if I cannot tell which of my beliefs is true and which false, then let me put them all in doubt and start afresh. Coherentism finds a larger place for the elimination of error, but it does so by way of a method that tests for consistency and inconsistency in the body of belief. The procedural epistemology of Maṇḍana and others will be happy, however, with the idea that the body of ordinary belief is already largely coherent; the problem is that, although coherent, it is also massively false. Procedural epistemologists are happy, indeed, to speak of 'two truths', or perhaps better, two 'standards of epistemological warrant' (see also §6.4). The body of ordinary belief, precisely because it is mostly coherent, works well enough in ordinary circumstances; it is, they will say, 'true at the level of the conventional' or the everyday (*vyavahāra-sat* or *saṃvṛti-sat*). Their epistemological project is a different one. It is to discover the means by which one can lever oneself out of such a body of largely adequate belief, given the fact or on the assumption that this body of belief is nonetheless massively erroneous. Procedural epistemology is a philosophical defence of the possibility of such a project. It is important to stress that the defence does not rest on the claim that error is phenomenologically distinguishable from truth. The defence depends on a subtler idea, that a properly constituted algorithmic procedure that is sensitive to and guided by the way things *in fact* are will lead from error to truth. In other words it is, to use the contemporary jargon, a first-personal but externalist conception of the

[32] For the Vedāntin, that's about all that can be said about it: the fact of colossal error is described as *anirvacanīya*, 'inexplicable', 'indeterminable' or, simply, 'that about which there is nothing more to say'. According to Robert Nozick, many philosophical problems have the same structure: How is X possible, given certain other things which 'apparently exclude' X? See his *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 9. Here, the fact of colossal error apparently excludes truth-directed inquiry.

project of epistemology. That makes it radically different from many of the epistemologies on the market.[33]

An illustrative example might be developed out of Leibniz's resolution to Molyneux's question.[34] Molyneux asks if a person blind from birth and acquainted with objects of various shapes only by touch, will, if their sight is restored to them, recognize and distinguish those same objects through sight alone. The problem is in part to do with the acquisition of concepts of space and spatial extension, where although the means by which those concepts are acquired is linked to one particular sense modality, the concepts themselves are not intrinsically sensory. Leibniz argued that the blind person does indeed acquire through touch an understanding of spatial and geometrical arrangement, an understanding that can then by applied in a priori reason to the visual. What makes this possible is the real structure of space itself. The procedural epistemologist will say of Molyneux's example that although the blind person inhabits an entirely tactile world, and to that extent lives in error about the true nature of things, their purely tactile acquaintance with the world nevertheless provides sufficient grounds by which, through reason, they can lever themselves into a more properly objective conception.

The critic will wonder if the blind person really does 'live in error'—by what necessity must we suppose that the purely tactile conception of the world, on the one hand, and the objective conception of it, on the other, are not simply compatible and equivalent ways of conceiving, different levels of description, of a single common world? This remains the central challenge for the epistemology of the 'two truths', to justify the value-judgement that one truth is 'higher' and 'ultimate' (*paramārtha*), while the

[33] Many of the writings of K. C. Bhattacharyya can be read as attempts to formulate a procedural epistemology. The self, he says, consists in freedom from error; indeed, in an echo of the Upaniṣadic conception discussed above, he says that the self as freedom resides in a 'feeling of feeling'. K. C. Bhattacharyya, 'The subject as freedom', reprinted in his *Studies in Philosophy* (Calcutta: Progressive Publishers, 1958 [vol. II]). George Burch comments that, according to Bhattacharyya, 'we attain subjectivity or freedom, and ultimately absolute freedom, by progressive rejection of the false or illusory in favour of the true or real. The method is cognitive; the end, freedom, is presumably truth.' George B. Burch, 'Search for the absolute in neo-Vedānta: the philosophy of K. C. Bhattacharyya', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (1967): 607–67; reprinted as the 'Introduction' to K. C. Bhattacharyya, *Search for the Absolute in Neo-Vedānta* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), p. 27.

[34] For recent discussions of Molyneux's question: Naomi Eilan, 'Molyneux's question and the idea of an external world', in Naomi Eilan et al. (eds) *Spatial Representation: Problems in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 236–55; Gareth Evans, 'Molyneux's question', in his *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

other is at best a 'concealment' (*saṃvṛti*) or a 'convention' (*vyavahāra*), and at worst an 'error' (*mithyā*) or 'illusion' (*māyā*). It seems to take for granted that our ordinary beliefs, especially about ourselves, are deeply in error, or at least, can be substantially improved.

5.5 The critique of procedural reason in Kumārila and Rāmānuja

Two Indian realists, Kumārila (*fl.*660 CE) and Rāmānuja (*c.*1050–1139 CE), both present criticisms of the very idea that reason has a procedural use. Kumārila, like Praśastapāda and Dharmakīrti, thinks that the type of inference the 'fire-fog' example is meant to exemplify is fallacious. His discussion falls within an intricate refutation of idealism in the 'nirālambanavāda' chapter of the *Ślokavārttika*. He argues that any attempted demonstration of idealism must appeal to premises the idealist himself or herself believes to be false. He then claims that no such demonstration is rationally compelling (either to its target audience, the realist, or to the idealist themselves):

[The idealist:] Perhaps I first established the conclusion by reasoning that is commonly accepted, even though [I see from the vantage point I reach that] it has no real basis? [Kumārila:] What is now revealed to have no real basis, how could it have had one before? And if not then how could it have [ever] proven anything? If it could prove anything, it must have had a real basis. Something unreal cannot prove something real, for [non-entities] like the hare's horn have never been seen to establish a truth. It is an error to cognise fire from something like fog that isn't smoke. So your idea of what is really true (*paramārtha*), since it is derived from a false premise (*asatya-hetu*), it too is false (*asatya*). Truth (*satya*) is not reached by way of what has only the appearance of truth (*satyābhāsa*).

(ŚV 5.3.155–9)[35]

Fog has at most the 'appearance' of a good reason, in that it resembles smoke, and the belief in fire it appears to justify is therefore a 'false' belief. Why does Kumārila say that the ensuing belief is 'false'? We have already

[35] Kumārila, *Ślokavārttika*. K. Sambasiva Sastri, (ed.), The *Mīmāṃsāślokavārttika with Sucaritamiśra's commentary, Kāśikā* (Trivandrum: Trivandrum Sanskrit Series 90, 1926), pp. 78–9. Kumārila's principal target is, presumably, the Mādhyamika *śūnyatāvāda*, but the argument abstracts from specifics and so is generalizable. I thank Robindra Martin Ganeri for help with these passages.

seen that it might very well be true—there may well be, by chance, a fire on the mountain. So Kumārila is not using 'true' and 'false' in their ordinary sense. In fact, Kumārila uses the terms 'true' and 'false' in a sense of appraisal, as when we speak of a 'true friend' or a 'false floor'.[36] When he says that the 'false' is that which has only the 'appearance of truth', it is to be taken in the same sense as that in which we say a false floor merely resembles a floor.[37] Inferences based on phoney evidence are like convictions grounded in a fabrication of the facts; and we might speak of a 'miscarriage of justification' just as we do of a 'miscarriage of justice'. The judgement in both cases is unsafe even if correct. Those philosophers who think that we are colossally in error, that there is a radical misrepresentation in ordinary experience—because experience represents the world as articulated by difference whereas in fact there is only unity—and yet who think that ordinary experience nevertheless provides us with the resources to lever ourselves into the truth, are similarly guilty of a miscarriage of justification. The procedural epistemologist will reply that the proper analogy is not with a miscarriage of justice, but with a witness who perjures himself or herself in court, and who does so not perfectly but in such a way that the perjury can come to light in the course of a process of cross-examination and cross-referencing with the testimony of others. The world is an imperfect perjurer, not a corrupt cop.

Kumārila's commentator Sucaritamiśra brings the discussion back to a specific aspect of the problem at hand. At the beginning of the chapter refuting idealism, Kumārila has already tried to argue that what goes by the name of 'concealing truth' (*saṃvṛti-satya*) is in fact not true at all, but 'false' (*mithyā*) (ŚV 5.3.6).[38] Now he points out that someone who denies the reality of all distinction cannot very well help themselves to a *distinction* between two truths. That seems to be bad news for any procedural conception of reason:

[36] Alan R. White, 'Truth as appraisal', *Mind* LXVI (1957): 318–30; Robert Kirkham, *Theories of Truth* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), §10.3.

[37] As a Mīmāṃsaka, Kumārila is also a *svataḥ-prāmāṇyavādin*: he believes that genuine belief states are intrinsically true. It follows that for him, a 'false' state is something that only pretends to be a genuine belief state. See my 'Traditions of truth: changing beliefs and the nature of inquiry', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33.1 (2005): 43–54.

[38] For discussion of ŚV 5.3.6–10, see B. K. Matilal, *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), pp. 153–4. See also Śāntideva BCA 9.2, and Prañākaramati's commentary thereon, where Kumārila's argument is rejected.

In your view there is no basis for a distinction between what is really true (*paramārtha*) and what is worldly (*loka*); how [then] is the real truth to be reached by means of the worldly?

(ŚV 5.3.166)

Sucaritamiśra's comment is very informative:

Besides, there is no basis for a division between what is really true and what is worldly, or conventionally true (*saṃvṛti-satya*), because that also refers to a distinction, and the cognition of it is [as of any distinction, for you] erroneous—this is the meaning of the sentence beginning 'what is really true.' Besides, if the worldly is the means by which the really true is reached, then it isn't really true, because it is reached by means of the worldly, just as in the case of fire and fog—this is the meaning of the sentence beginning 'the worldly.' Earlier [Kumārila] refuted the distinction between the truths. Now, he disputes the idea that the conventional is the means to the really true. Nevertheless, it is claimed by the followers of Vedānta that even from a conceptual illusion (*prapañca*), such as are the Upaniṣads, there is a determination of *brahman* in the shape of a dissolution of conceptual illusion. They say, among other things, 'There is a determination by way of the dissolution of the conceptual illusion of difference;' and again, 'Truth and error—he who knows them both together passes beyond death by error, and by truth attains immortality' [Īśā Upaniṣad 11]. What does this say? Brahman is the one whose form is truth (*vidyā*), the Upaniṣads and the rest have the form of error (*avidyā*). He who knows them both passes beyond the death that is marked by error, and goes to the bliss of *brahman* that is marked with the essence of truth. So it is claimed that from error indeed truth is obtained (*avidyāt eva vidyā-prāptir*). Is this then refuted by what we say? Our final view is that it is not the case that a conceptual illusion such as are the Upaniṣads, even though false, is the means for knowing *brahman*. For those things that are established by a proper means of knowing like perception are incapable of concealment (*apahnava*); such as the individual self, which is established by the perception, 'I am it!'[39]

Sucaritamiśra reminds us that we are specifically concerned with the problematic status of the scriptures, here the Upaniṣads, and their role in freeing individuals of a false view of self. For the Upaniṣads themselves are our method of knowing the real truth, that the world is undivided and unitary; and yet that truth itself implies that the Upaniṣads are 'false'. They are 'false' not because of what they *say*—indeed, what they say is that the

[39] *Ślokavārttika*, pp. 80–1.

world is unitary and undivided—but because of what they *are*, namely differentiated and articulated structures of sound. They are themselves a part of the illusion in which we dwell, if what they 'teach' is that we inhabit an illusion. Either the Upaniṣads are false, or else, if true, then false. So either way, they are false. This is not officially a paradox; it is a 'protreptic argument' in the Aristotelian sense.[40]

The critique of procedural reason presented by Rāmānuja (a critique aimed at Śaṅkara, in the first instance) is very interesting. A procedural epistemology begins with the fact that we are massively in error about ourselves and the world we inhabit, that our ordinary methods of knowing either ourselves or our world, principal among which is perceptual observation, are corrupt. If, however, the only reason given for the global unreliability of the senses is that scriptures like the Upaniṣads speak of our erroneous misconception of the world as a diversity, then that reason will apply in equal measure to the Upaniṣads themselves:

Someone who is scared because he miscognises a rope as a snake does not lose his fear even when he is told that it is not a snake and that he should not be afraid, if those words are spoken by someone whom he thinks is in error.[41]

The argument that all is error because the scriptures teach that this is so implies an error in its own premise and so defeats itself. The function of the Upaniṣads is protreptic—they exhort the reader to reflect upon the unity of *brahman*—but in so upturning the mind of the reader, they also overturn themselves (p.118):

And indeed, the fact that the scriptures are rooted in error (*doṣamūla*) comes to be known at the very moment when they are heard recited, because the reflective thinking [that ensues] consists in a repetitive reflection about the oneness of brahman with the soul, crushing all the differences [between knower and known, word and sentence] that follow from the heard recitation.

[40] A. H. Chroust, *Aristotle: Protrepticus, A Reconstruction* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1964), esp. pp. 3, 48–9. The argument is called 'protreptic' because in its original form it is an exhortation to philosophy: either it is necessary to study philosophy, or it is not; if it is not, then it is; therefore, it is.

[41] Rāmānuja, *Śrī Bhāṣyam*, M. A. Lakmithathachar, chief ed., Melkote critical edition (Melkote: Academy of Sanskrit Research, 1985–91), vol. I, pp. 117–24; at p. 118. Cf. G. Thibaut, *The Vedānta Sūtras with the Commentary by Rāmānuja* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 48, 1904), pp. 73–8.

There is, then, a conflict between the testimony of the scriptures and the evidence of the senses, and no good reason to think that scripture is the 'stronger'; perhaps there is no colossal error and so no work of 'levering out' for a procedural epistemology even to do. Where is the epistemological asymmetry that weighs in favour of the testimony of scriptures and against the evidence of the senses? Perhaps the asymmetry consists in this: the proposition that *brahman* is the sole unity is never defeated or contradicted by any other evidence, while the propositions of the senses are often defeated, or at least are potentially defeasible. To this, the astute response is that indefeasibility is not a criterion of truth, a response that Rāmānuja illustrates with a beautiful example (pp. 119–20):

> Whatever has its roots in error is not ultimately real (*apāramārthya*), even if it is uncontradicted (*abādhita*). Here's what we say.
>
> Suppose that in some mountain caves, far away from other, normal sighted, people, there live a people who are afflicted with [the visual defect] *timira* [double-vision]. They are all ignorant of the fact that they have *timira*, and, because they are all equally beset with *timira*, they think without exception the moon to be double. There is never a defeating cognition here, but it still isn't the case that this judgement isn't false (*mithyā*)—indeed, the doubleness of the moon which it has as its object is certainly a false object. The eye-defect is responsible for the cognitions' lack of accord with reality (*ayathārthajñāna*). Just the same is the [procedural reasoner's] cognition of brahman, which, being rooted in misconception (*avidyā*), is certainly false along with its object, viz. brahman, even if there is no defeating cognition.

With the help of this elegant example, Rāmānuja presents a robust defence of a realist conception of truth; that there are, or at least could be, truths that are evidence-transcendent. Where Śrīharṣa argued that rational acceptability is not necessary for truth, since a belief can be true by chance, the claim now that it is not sufficient either—a belief might be false even in maximally ideal cognitive conditions. This thereby also rejects the indefeasibilist principle—that a statement which can never be defeated must be true—for the scriptural statement that *brahman* alone is real might be both indefeasible and false.[42] To adapt our judicial metaphor, the 'world'

[42] The strongest advocates of the indefeasibilist principle (*svataḥ-prāmāṇyavāda*) are, in fact, the Mīmāṃsakas Śabara and Kumārila. Kumārila claims that self-knowledge is indefeasible (*Ślokavārttika*, *Ātmavāda* 133), as is the testimony of the Vedas. See John Taber, 'What did Kumārila Bhaṭṭa mean by *svataḥ prāmāṇya*?', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 (1992): 204–17.

might be a *perfect* perjurer, a perjurer who survives all cross-examination; or else, it might be a case of *mass* perjury, when the testimony of each witness is entirely corroborated by the equally perjurous testimony of every other.

Having questioned the presupposition from which a procedural epistemology begins, the presupposition that we are colossally in error, Rāmānuja begins his presentation of a critique of the idea of a procedural epistemology itself. We are, let us suppose, colossally in error; the scriptures that tell us this are themselves a part of that error; and yet even so they can help us lead ourselves out of error and into the truth—so goes the story. Rāmānuja refers to an analogy preferred by some procedural epistemologists, but not others. The objects about which we dream are unreal, and yet those dream states can be the cause of real knowledge; for example, when the dream is a premonition of a real future event.[43] The familiar response is that the analogy is based upon an equivocation of vehicle and content (a response already alluded to by Maṇḍana). Dreams are real mental events with false contents, and real entities can produce real effects. The misperception of a rope as a snake really does produce fear in the misperceiver. If what the procedural epistemologist claims is correct, however, then the scriptures are unreal entities with true contents! The Upaniṣad itself *qua vehicle* is not real, if what it states is true, namely that there is no real diversity. It would be as if (to return once more to my juridical metaphor) the jury were played a tape on which they heard the victim's voice saying 'Your Honour, that man did indeed murder me!' Even if the message on the tape is true, the nature of the medium should give us pause. What epistemological weight can we place on an oral document which *by what it itself says* betrays itself as phoney? Briefly reviewing in a similar manner all Maṇḍana's examples, Rāmānuja then concludes his presentation of the critique (p. 124):

It is, therefore, very hard to demonstrate that a cognition of brahman is true (*satya*) on the basis of the scriptures, which are [said to be] untrue (*asatya*).

Now perhaps one might say that the scriptures are not unreal in the way the sky-flower is, because they were viewed as real up until one came to think about non-difference and as unreal only when this thought arose. The scriptures are not, at this later time, the means of knowing brahman, consisting in pure consciousness,

[43] The analogy stems from Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* under 2.1.14, a passage that is the main source for Śaṅkara's statement, rather less developed than Maṇḍana's, of the idea of a procedural epistemology. In the same passage, Śaṅkara refers to the case of the phoney snakebite and the example of the written letters (see above). Maṇḍana is cautious of the dream analogy, perhaps with good reason.

wholly without differentiation. When they *are* the means, the scriptures are, at *that* time, certainly real (*asti*), because they are viewed as real.

To this, we say that it is not so: for if the scriptures are unreal, then the view of them as real is false (*mithyā*). So what? A cognition generated by scriptures that are unreal is itself false, and so its object too, in this case [the existence of] brahman, is false. It's like this—because the cognition of fire generated by fog misperceived as smoke is false, so too is its object, the [existence of] fire, false.

Nor has it been established that [the existence of brahman alone] is indefeasible, because it can be defeated by a later statement, 'all is empty.' This later statement cannot be dismissed as being rooted in error, because you yourself have said that your statement [''Brahman alone exists''] has its roots in an error [namely, the Vedic texts themselves]. And, indeed, the later statement [just mentioned, namely 'all is empty''] might itself be said to be indefeasible!

Enough of this destruction of a quite groundless piece of bad reasoning! [i.e. the Advaita theory that one can come to know that brahman alone exists by way of the error that is the Upaniṣads.]

Powerful though it is, Rāmānuja's critique is not decisive.[44] It does not follow from the fact that the method of belief-formation is error-involving that the belief so formed, here that brahman alone exists, is false. What Rāmānuja's argument does is to lead us to a final clarification of the proceduralist's position. Perhaps, the suggestion goes, even if the scriptures are phoney, they can continue to have a protreptic and soteriological effect as long as the listener believes them to be genuine. Consider another kind of example: a fake painting might well be appreciated—and indeed might lead the viewer to that reorientation in their perception of the world at which good art is sometimes said to aim—just as long as it is *not* perceived as a forgery. The false art's appearance as true is a necessary precondition for its having a transformative effect on the viewer. Perhaps all transformation and all protrepsis depends in this way on an element of deceit and illusion, that the audience must 'enter into' the deceit if there is to be that reconfiguration of mind the writer, painter or teacher intends to bring about. If so, then the fact that the medium is a phoney is not, after all, sufficient to imply the falsity of its message, any more than one can

[44] For an elaboration and development of Rāmānuja's argumentation, see also the later Viśiṣṭādvaita thinker Vedānta Deśika (1268–*c.* 1350 CE); in particular vāda 30 of his *Śatadūṣaṇī*. See also S. M. Srinivasa Chari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita: A Study Based on Vedānta Deśika's Śatadūṣaṇī* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999, revised 2nd edn), chapter 1.

conclude that there is no fire because the fog is misperceived. There are species of error (*mithyā*) other than untruth (*asatya*). The same response will be given to the objection pressed both by Kumārila and Udayana, that the proceduralist occupies a dialectically impossible position. Śrīharṣa, indeed, does exactly that.[45]

This critique of procedural reason has helped us finally to disentangle the idea of a procedural epistemology from the idea simply of a valid inference with false premises and true conclusion. For in a procedural epistemology, the content born by an unreal and so 'false' vehicle is, in part, true, and the procedure is one in which the content is at least provisionally entertained as true even while the phoneyness of the vehicle is concealed. As I appreciate the painting, and allow its vision to upturn my soul, I shall perhaps in the course of that very process of transformation arrive at the ability to see the painting as a forgery—why should it matter so very much that it was an 'error' that led me to the truth?[46] The transformative rationality that the use of philosophy as therapy rests on is to be distinguished from the rationality of syllogistic argumentation.

The procedural epistemologist says that we are all as 'blind' as are the blind population in Rāmānuja's example, but that our blindness does not prohibit us from *extracting* an objective conception of the world from a merely tactile and auditory acquaintance with it, as we saw in our discussion of Molyneux. All that we cannot do is to form any conception of how the world *looks* to a sighted person. But that is, after all, only another mode of sensory acquaintance, and there are many such ways the world might appear—that we cannot understand 'from within' the sonar world of the bat is not, of itself, a serious epistemological deficit. This, indeed, might be the reason why those sensory and other 'conventional' levels of conception should be regarded as levels of concealment or error, while the other is 'higher' and 'ultimate', a distant point of convergence, an invariant.

[45] For Udayana, see *Ātmatattvaviveka*, Dhundhiraja Sastri (ed.) (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series no. 463–4, 1940), p. 283 ff. Śrīharṣa responds in the opening sections of the *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. Similar points are made by Śāntideva BCA 9.106–17.

[46] Compare the defence Śrīharṣa gives. He says, for example, 'How is it possible for [knowledge of non-difference] to be produced by the [supposedly unreal] Vedic texts? This objection would hold if the Vedic texts really [themselves] did produce it. But their efficacy resides in an error, and so is not in contradiction with a real inefficacy' (p. 142). He concludes his discussion as follows: 'Non-difference, which has somehow been taken hold of as the meaning of the Vedic texts that deny plurality, having itself become self-illuminating consciousness, amazingly extricates itself from argument and counter-argument pressing in from both sides' (p. 146).

At the end, learning to *appreciate* the Upaniṣads as one might a work of art leads one to a reformation in one's relationship with oneself and the world, to a more objective, impartial view.

There remains a question about procedural epistemology that is not yet answered, and it is this. Does the procedure of levering oneself out consist in a process of 'triangulation', in which—to continue with the example of sense-experience—we cross-reference touch and sound, or sight and touch, in order to arrive at a conception of the world, and of ourselves within it, that is not *specific* to a sense modality, or indeed dependent on the senses at all? The Nyāya philosophers believe that such cross-referencing is the route to an objective conception of self, as we will see in the next chapter. But if that is right, then are we so sure that we are not as one whose access to the world is restricted to a single sense modality? Are we sure that our 'colossal error' is not *so* grave that even a procedural epistemology will be of no avail? There is a clear risk of instability in the very idea of a procedural epistemology, which while telling us we are colossally in error and yet that there is a way out, courts the possibility that the depths of that error will be understated, or turn out to be greater than even the proceduralist had imagined; and then there will be no path out, not even an oblique one. The Upaniṣadic self must not be *too* well hidden, the Buddha's teachings not *too* hard to understand; but what is there to reassure us that this is not indeed the case?

I will not, however, pursue the matter any further here. Instead, I want now to turn, finally, to an examination of various conceptions about self. These are the conceptions philosophers in India work extremely hard to develop out of the source texts. We have now looked both at the source texts and at the methods of development, and are finally in a position to consider the conceptions themselves. If the patient is to be cured, the doctor must understand both good health and the disease.

PART III
A Selfless Person's Sense of Self

6

The Imperfect Reality of Persons

Of what then are we the moving shadows?

Mauni[1]

6.1 Suffering: the cause and the cure

If the Buddha is indeed a psychological doctor, struggling to cure us of our pain and suffering with the medicine that is his philosophy (see chapter 4), it would seem that he is more like an official of the World Health Organization than a general practitioner in a local surgery: his concern is with the global eradication of suffering, rather than with tending the needs of particular individuals. We ought not to conclude, however, that the Buddha's interest in persons is merely statistical, and this is because of another claim he makes, namely, that the path to the removal of suffering rests in freedom from mistaken conceptions of self, or mistaken ideas about what having this concept consists in.[2] So, while the Buddha's ultimate *goal* is characterizable in wholly impersonal terms, the *means* by which the goal is realized is necessarily tailored to the individual. For, as we have seen in some detail in two earlier chapters, the Buddha's teachings about

[1] *Mauni: A Writer's Writer*, short stories translated by Lakshmi Holmström (New Delhi: Katha, 1997), p. 48.

[2] *nairātmya-darśanaṃ śreyo-mārgam*. As Richard Gombrich observes, this is 'the most fundamental doctrine of Buddhism: that Enlightenment consists in *realizing* that there is no soul or enduring essence in living beings', in 'Review of J. T. Ergardt', *Numen* 26 (1979): 270. The final section of the *Snake Sutta*, a text we examined in detail in an earlier chapter, rehearses the idea without asserting a 'no self' view. It is perhaps worth stressing that the claim is not that we labour under a *self-deception*. Self-deception has to do with wilful errors in my *de se* judgements about my own motivations and desires; the error to which the Buddha refers has to do with mistakes about the possession of a concept of self as such. It might nevertheless be the case that an error about the nature of the self is necessarily involved in any act of self-deception; Richard Holton argues this in 'What is the role of the self in self-deception?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101 (2000/01): 53–69.

the self are ineliminably pragmatic or 'skilful'. To any given audience, he will teach such a doctrine about self as is calculated best to divest that particular audience of its false sense of self. Indeed, to an audience made up of moral sceptics and hedonists, the Buddha is willing to declare that there *is* indeed a permanent self, because this will instil in that audience a sense of moral commitment and responsibility. Fostering a sense of self in those who do not have it may well be the best way to encourage a concern for their own future pain, and a concern for one's own pain could well be the necessary precondition for a concern about the pain of others.[3] And yet these prudential concerns bring with them distinctive kinds of suffering, anxieties about one's own future and survival, not to mention a whole panoply of desires that in one way or another presuppose a belief in the 'enduring essence' of things. To combat those sufferings in an audience who already has a prudentially grounded moral sense, the Buddha will teach a more refined doctrine, that there is no enduring self, and that the endurance of a self can't be what really matters in questions of survival, moral responsibility and quality of life. But whatever doctrine the Buddha teaches, the aim is always tactical and pragmatic: to divest that audience of the sense of self that perpetuates suffering, so as to reduce the total amount of suffering globally and impersonally conceived, and to redirect the attention of the audience in the direction of 'what matters'. It is therefore only with a great deal of caution that we can speak of the Buddha himself as having and advancing a theory of self or no-self at all.[4]

The earlier chapters of this book have all, in one way or another, been reinforcing the point that errors to do with the place the notion of self has in our mental lives run too deep to be corrigible merely through conceptual analysis alone. The 'cure' for *these* misconceptions is never simply to *announce* the right view. On the other hand, we have also seen that later Buddhist philosophers, participating in the Sanskrit intellectual

[3] 'Likewise, each person holds himself most dear; hence one who loves himself (*attakāmo*) should not harm others,' Saṃyutta Nikāya i 172. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 171.

[4] See also Lambert Schmithausen, 'Ich und Erlösung im Buddhismus', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 53 (1969): 157–70, 'Spirituelle Praxis und philosophische Theorie im Buddhismus', *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 57 (1973): 161–186; Klaus Oetke, '*Ich' und das Ich: analytische Untersuchungen zur buddhistisch-brahmanischen Atmankontroverse* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1988), pp. 57–242. For an overview of the debate: Alex Watson, *The Self's Awareness of Itself: Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha's Arguments against the Buddhist Doctrine of No-Self* (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 2007), §1.1.

world, did seek to articulate theories about the constitution and role of the concept of self; and they were also willing to engage with their philosophical opponents in substantive 'truth-directed' debate about the self.[5] They are concerned, especially, to locate the source of error that underwrites the false thinking about self to which we are habitually attached. This project incurs two distinct philosophical commitments. One is to identify false constitutive accounts of the concept of self, and provide instead a true account of what our concept of self consists in. The other is to consider whether the concept of self, correctly described, has any place in a properly constituted mental life.[6] 'No Self!', understood as a rallying cry, can refer to either project: it can be a call for the rejection of a mistaken understanding of what the concept of self commits us to; and it can be a call for that concept, even properly understood, to be shown the door.[7]

In this chapter, my interest is primarily in the thought of the great Ābhidhārmika Buddhist intellectual Vasubandhu (*c.*360 CE), author of the compendious *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. He has often been described as a Reductionist, and I will agree with this description, although, as we will see, the identification needs to be handled with care. In the next chapter, I will examine the radical theory of the Mādhyamika philosophers, as developed in particular by Candrakīrti. They offer an extremely interesting analysis of the concept of self, an analysis that could well be described as a 'no-self' theory of self. In the end, however, they regard the concept of self, even correctly understood, to be an ill from which we must be cured—they say 'No!' to the self that is no self.[8]

[5] For a discussion of the 'Buddhist turn to Sanskrit' around the beginning of the first millennium: Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 56–9.

[6] One might, for example, compare arguments against the inclusion of the concept *self* and the term 'self' with arguments for a corresponding claim about racist concepts and terms. Michael Dummett, for instance, argues that such terms introduce 'non-conservative' extensions in the language. Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1981). Alternatively, one might base an argument for the claim on the idea that the concept of self has outrun its original evolutionary value, as does Mark Leary, *The Curse of the Self: Self-Awareness, Egoism and the Quality of Human Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[7] Compare Jon Elster, 'Nobody at home', *London Review of Books* 2–15 June 1983: 9–11: 'Buddhism offers three doctrines with respect to the self. First, it contains a theoretical critique of the notion of an enduring self, together with a constructive analysis of the actual unity and continuity of the person .... Next, [it] offers an account of the emergence of the illusionary belief in the self .... Finally, and crucially, [it] proposes a way of overcoming this spontaneously arising illusion.'

[8] The Abhidharma and Mādhyamika accounts might be seen as offering complementary analyses, the first of the objective phenomenal self (perhaps akin to what William James calls the 'me-self'), and

6.2 Was the Buddha the first bundle theorist?

Everyone knows that the Buddha talked about five streams of psycho-physical elements (*skandha-santāna*), and said that it is a mistake to think about self.[9] But did he mean that it is a mistake to think that the self is something over and above the elements, or did he mean that it is a mistake to think that the self is *anything* at all, when in fact there are only the elements? Is the idea that there is a right and a wrong way for the notion of self to figure in our mental lives, and what the Buddha does is to help us remove our attachment to false ways of thinking about self? Or is the point that we can give a perfectly correct account of the concept of self, but we go wrong in allowing that concept any place in our mental lives at all? Of necessity, Buddhist discussion of the self addresses both these questions.

David Hume said that he could never *catch himself* without a perception, nor 'observe anything other than the perception'. He claimed that we resort to the notion of a soul, and a self, and substance, 'to disguise the variation' in the succession of our perceptions, a notion that is 'a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable'.[10] The mind, he said, is really a 'bundle', or a 'commonwealth', or a 'theatre' of perceptions, and it is the bundle that settles questions about the identity of the *person* over time. He clearly does not think that the *self* consists in a bundle of perceptions, but it is less certain that he takes

the second of selfhood as experienced from within (the 'I-self'). See William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1910).

[9] Richard Sorabji points to evidence that even the Greek and Roman philosophers in the first century CE knew it, because 'the Buddhist reason for not fearing death is found both in the Stoic Seneca [*c.*4 BCE–64 CE] and in the Platonist Plutarch [*c.*46–127 CE], but in a way that remains incompatible with the rest of what they say, which suggests that it is an alien growth'. He is referring to Seneca *Letters* 24, 19–21; 58, 22–3, and Plutarch *On the E at Delphi* 392 C–E. See his *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), chapter 5, and his *Emotion and Peace of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002a), pp. 247–8. We might note here that Clement of Alexandria (*c.*150–215 CE) mentions the Buddha in his *Stromateis*, saying, 'Some, too, of the Indians obey the precepts of Boutta, whom, on account of his extraordinary sanctity, they have raised to divine honours' (*Strom.* 1.71.6). Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, trans. John Ferguson (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), p. 76. Ferguson comments that '[t]he reference to the Buddha is exceptionally interesting: Pantænus may have travelled in the East'. Pantænus was the teacher of Clement and the founder of the catechetical school in Alexandria; Eusebius (*c.*260–340 CE) informs us that he went to India. It is certainly possible, too, that there were Buddhists in Alexandria then.

[10] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 252–3.

resorting to the fiction that there is a self to be necessarily an ill from which we must be cured.

Derek Parfit rejects two claims: (i) that '[w]e are, or partly consist in, souls, or immaterial substances'; and (ii) that '[t]here are no persons, thinkers, or agents. There are only persisting bodies and related sequences of thoughts, experiences, and acts.' The first of these he calls the Cartesian View; the second, the Buddhist View.[11] He has defended a third view, Reductionism, that '[o]ur existence consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of various interrelated mental processes and events. Our identity over time consists in physical and/or psychological continuity.'[12] A reductionist claims that where there had seemed to be two things, we find that in fact we have only one, but need not deny the reality of either.[13] In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit relates Reductionism to the claim that there are indeed such things as persons, even though we could give a complete description of reality without mentioning persons;[14] but sustained criticism of the 'impersonal description' thesis has led him to retreat from it.[15] The idea behind that thesis is that talk of persons introduces no new entities. Talk of sequences and bundles of experiences is the basis for the introduction of persons into discourse, just as talk of bounded flows of water is the basis for our talk of rivers; but this talk introduces no new entities: what it does is to allow the old ones to be spoken of in new ways. However, it has seemed to many critics that talk of flows of experience *depends on* talk of persons; that one cannot talk about the first and not the second (see further chapter 7).

An important consequence of Parfit's work has been the considerable recent attention to the idea that personal identity is not what matters to survival. This is a topic I will return to in the final section of the next

[11] Derek Parfit, 'Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes', *Philosophical Topics* 26 (1999): 217–70; at 260.

[12] 'Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes', p. 218.

[13] 'Reductionist accounts aim to show that where we thought we had two sets of concepts, entities, laws, explanations, or properties, we in fact have only one, which is most perspicuously characterized in terms of the reducing vocabulary . . . . [but] there is little attempt to effect a translation of one discourse into another.' Kathleen Lennon and David Charles (eds), *Reduction, Explanation and Realism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 2.

[14] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1984), p. 212.

[15] '[The impersonal description thesis], as I shall admit here, was a mistake.'.'Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes', p. 218. The critics include John Campbell, *Past, Space, & Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), and Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

chapter; indeed, I think that the same idea is to be found in an early Buddhist text. What I wish to consider now is Parfit's discussion of what he has called the Buddhist View. Parfit refers to a passage which he claims shows that the Buddha himself said that there are no persons but only streams of experience.[16] The text in question is a Nikāya passage from the *Sutta on Ultimate Emptiness*, which is quoted by Vasubandhu in his famous 'Refutation of the Theory of a Self' (*ātmavāda-pratiṣedha*), otherwise known by the name 'Examination of the Person' (*pudgala-viniścāya*).[17] Parfit reads from an English version that Theodore Stcherbatsky had prepared from Jinamitra's Tibetan translation: 'There are acts, and also their consequences, but there is no agent who acts ... There is no person, it is only a conventional name given to a set of elements.'[18] A comparison with the now available Sanskrit text[19] reveals that something has gone wrong here. First, the term *saṅketa* has been read by the Tibetan translator according to the more technical meaning 'conventional name' rather than the more natural and modest '(causal) agreement'.[20] Second, and more seriously, the sense

[16] Derek Parfit, 'Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes', p. 260. In an interview, he says, 'I do not accept the Buddhist no self view, since I believe that persons exist.'.*Cogito* 9 (1995): 123. Parfit concedes that the claim might be simply an emphatic way of rejecting *souls*; but that is not actually what is going on either, as we will see. A passage that does seem emphatic in just that sense is quoted by Buddhaghoṣa: 'For there is suffering, but none who suffers; there is doing but no doer; extinction, but no one extinguished; although there is a path, but no traveller (*dukkham eva, na koci dukkhato, kārako na, kiriy āva vijjati/atthi nibbuti, na nibbuto pumā, maggam atthi, gamako na vijjatī*.' (16.90). *Visuddhimagga of Buddhaghośācārya*, critically edited by Swami Dwarikadas Shastri (Varanasi: Baudha Bharati, 1977), p.433. Trans. Bhikkhu Ñyāṇamoli, *The Path of Purification* (Colombo: Semage, 1964), p. 587.

[17] It is an appendix to his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu*, critically edited by Dwarikadas Shastri (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1973), pp. 1189–1234. For translations, see James Duerlinger, *Indian Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's 'Refutation of the Theory of Self'* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), and Matthew T. Kapstein, *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), pp. 347–74.

[18] Derek Parfit, 'Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes', p. 260. The quotation is from Theodore Stcherbatsky, 'The soul theory of the Buddhists', *Bulletin de l' Académie des Sciences de Russie* (1919), Series VI, vol. XIII, pp. 823–54 and 937–58; at p.845. Parfit cites the same passage in *Reasons and Persons*, p. 502. There he says, 'I claim that, when we ask what persons are, and how they continue to exist, the fundamental question is a choice between two views. On one view, we are separately existing entities, distinct from our brain and bodies and our experiences, and entities whose existence must be all-or-nothing. The other view is the Reductionist View. And I claim that, of these, the second view is true. As [the text cited] shows, *Buddha would have agreed*' (p. 273). The Buddha may or may not have agreed, but Vasubandhu probably would have; and, ironically, if Parfit had had a better translation available to him, he might not have changed his own mind.

[19] *asti karma, asti vipākaḥ, kārakas tu nopalabhyate. ya imāṃś ca skandhān nikṣipati, anyāṃś ca skandhān pratisandhāty anyatra dharmasaṅketāt. Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, p. 1208. Compare Duerlinger, p. 88; Kapstein, p. 362.

[20] Thus Poussin: 'The meaning of the expression *anyatra dharmasaṅketāt* is not in doubt. The *Vyākhyā* [Yaśomitra's commentary] explains *dharmasaṅketād iti pratītyasamutpādalakṣanāt*: "outside of

of the original '*anyatra* + ablative' construction has been entirely lost. A better translation is provided by Duerlinger: 'There is action and its result, but no agent is perceived that casts off one set of aggregates and takes up another elsewhere apart from the elements[21] agreed upon (to arise interdependently).' So the passage cited does not deny that there are persons: it says that there are no persons who are not comprised of streams. Nor does the text provide any support for the claim that the Buddha thought that persons are fictions, or that personal names are *merely* conventional (if by that what is meant is that they are metaphorical or fictional designations), that is, that the Buddha's attitude towards persons was the same as Hume's attitude towards selves.

Vasubandhu's point, in citing the passage, is simply that he has no quarrel with someone who speaks of a 'person' (*pudgala*), as long as they mean nothing more by that than the stream; and, in particular, that they do not mean that what they call the 'person' is something ontologically independent of the stream. It is no accident that Vasubandhu makes this point as forcefully as he can here. In one of his sermons, *The Burden*, the Buddha spoke about 'the burden, the carrier of the burden, the taking up of the burden and the laying down of the burden'.[22] He then explains that the burden concerns the streams of psychological and physical elements; the carrier of the burden is the person (*pudgala*), 'this venerable one of such a name and clan'; taking up the burden is craving, and laying it down is the complete cessation of craving. The view is summed up in verse:

> The five aggregates are truly burdens,
> The burden-carrier is the person.
> Taking up the burden is suffering in the world,
> Laying the burden down is blissful.

the combination of the *dharma*s, that is to say, outside of the successive causation of the *dharma*s"; and elsewhere (ad iii.18): *saṅketa = hetuphalasaṃb and havyavasthā* [agreement in the relation of cause and effect]. But Paramārtha [the Chinese translator; Jinamitra does the same] understands *saṅketa* as "metaphorical designation," from whence the translation, "One does not maintain the existence of an agent … except when, conforming to worldly usage, one says that the *dharma*s are a *pudgala* [person]".' Louis de la Vallée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, English trans. by Leo M. Pruden (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988–90), vol. IV, p. 1369.

[21] Given that one objection to reductionism is that experiences are not 'ontologically prior' to persons, this use of the term 'element' for *skandha* should be taken with a light touch.

[22] Saṃyutta Nikāya iii, 25–6. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 871.

> Having laid the heavy burden down
> Without taking up another burden,
> Having drawn out craving with its root,
> One is free from hunger, fully quenched.

This sermon became a key text for one group of Buddhists, the Pudgalavādins, who maintained that the 'person' (*pudgala*) was something distinct from the aggregates.[23] These are the people whom Vasubandhu is trying to refute in his 'Examination of the person'. Richard Gombrich says that this sermon 'caused a good deal of trouble in the history of Buddhist thought ... a whole school of Buddhists, the *pudgala-vādin*, took this text as their main authority for claiming that the person was a sixth entity, separate from the five *khandha*, since it was that person, not the five *khandha*, which was subject to craving and so picked the *khandha* up'.[24] Vasubandhu, however, interprets the statement quoted by Parfit as saying that there is no harm in talking about a person, as indeed the Buddha himself does here, but only on the understanding that it is not something 'separate from' the five streams of aggregates.[25]

If neither the Buddha nor Vasubandhu is claiming that 'there are no persons, thinkers or agents', is it right to describe either of them as a Reductionist? And what about the Pudgalavādins? They are still Buddhists, after all, and like all Buddhists reject what Parfit calls the Cartesian View. A helpful metaphor here, one exploited by all Buddhists, is the metaphor of fire and fuel. The Buddha himself, in *The Fire Sermon*, said that the fires of lust, hatred and delusion burn away in the sense-faculties as well as in

[23] They numbered more than a quarter of all the Buddhist monks in India in the seventh century, according to the testimony of Hsüan-tsang (602–664 CE), the Chinese pilgrim-scholar who spent twenty years in India before returning to China in order to translate many Indian Buddhist texts. See Leonard C. D. C. Priestley, *Pudgalavāda Buddhism: The Reality of the Indeterminate Self* (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, 1999); Thich Thiên Châu, *The Literature of the Personalists of Early Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), and 'Les réponses des Pudgalavādin aux critiques des écoles bouddhiques', *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10 (1987): 33–53. It is possible that there is at least one contemporary Pudgalavādin: Richard Sorabji. See his *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006) for a defence of owners.

[24] Richard Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began* (London: Athlone, 1996), pp. 67–8.

[25] See also Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 164–5. Collins notes that the Pali word *hāra* is better translated as 'the act of carrying or bearing' than as an agent noun, 'the carrier or bearer', and remarks, '[t]the idea, then, is that the "person" is a state created by the act of "picking up" the burden of the *khandhā*, through desire, a state which simply consists in the act of "bearing the burden"'. This is an idea to which we will return in chapter 7.

the perceptions and feelings they produce, whether pleasant or painful.[26] Furthermore, the word for fuel is *upādāna*, a word whose other meaning in both Pāli and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit is 'grasping, clinging, addiction, attachment'. Related to this is the term *upādāya*, whose core meaning is 'taking to oneself, assuming', and which is used in both languages in the sense of 'on the basis of, making use of, depending on'. This is also the very term that the Pudgalavādins (as reported by Vasubandhu) use to state their view, and it is immediately elaborated in terms of the fire-fuel metaphor:

> [The Pudgalavādins assert that] a person is not substantially real (*dravyataḥ*) or real by way of conception (*prajñaptitaḥ*), since he is conceived in reliance upon (*upādāya*) aggregates which pertain to himself, are acquired, and exist in the present... A person is [conceived] in the way in which fire is conceived in reliance upon fuel. Fire is conceived in reliance upon fuel, it is not conceived unless fuel is present and cannot be conceived if it either is or is not other than fuel... Similarly, a person is not conceived unless aggregates are present. If he were other than aggregates, the eternal transcendence theory [that a person is substantially real] would be held, and if he were not other than the aggregates, the nihilism theory [that a person does not exist at all] would be held.[27]

The Pudgalavādin is using the metaphor of fire and fuel to explain a sense in which there can be relations of conceptual and ontological dependence between two things. Parfit distinguishes, among various sorts of ontological dependence, between *adjectival* and *compositional* ontological dependence.[28] The first is illustrated by the relation between a dent and a surface; the second by the relation between a tree and the cells of which it is composed. The difference between the Pudgalavādin and Vasubandhu might then lie in this: the Pudgalavādin thinks that persons are adjectivally dependent on streams of physical and psychological elements, while Vasubandhu thinks that the relation is one of compositional dependence (a person, Vasubandhu says, is not other than the stream). For fire is essentially *in* the fuel it is burning, as dents are essentially *in* or *of* surfaces. We cannot say that the dent is *something* other than the surface, or that it is *just* the surface. If this way of distinguishing the views is right, then both have given textually admissible

[26] Saṃyutta Nikāya iv, 28. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, p. 1143.

[27] *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, p. 1163; trans. Duerlinger, pp. 73–4. As we will see in the next chapter, Candrakīrti uses the same 'neither ... nor ...' argument, but to very different effect.

[28] 'Experiences, Subjects, and Conceptual Schemes', p. 226. For a related distinction, see Vātsyāyana under *Nyāyasūtra* 3.1.1 (quoted below).

interpretations of the Buddha's words, and neither endorses the Cartesian View; but only Vasubandhu is a Reductionist. None of our Buddhists, though, holds to what Parfit has called 'the Buddhist View'. Indeed this is *ucchedavāda*, nihilism, one of the two extremes between which the Buddha sought a Middle Way, the other being *śāśvatvāda*, eternalism, the Cartesian View.[29] Not that either of our Buddhists is yet out of the woods. The Pudgalavādin says that, distinct from yet dependent on the psycho-physical stream, the person is 'inexplicable' (*avyaktavya*); but that claim itself requires explication. And Vasubandhu seems to assume that it is possible to talk about the psycho-physical stream (*skandha-santāna*) without mentioning persons, and also seems to assume that the stream is not itself ontologically dependent, either adjectivally or constitutively, on persons; but we have come to appreciate how problematic both those assumptions are.

6.3 Why persons are not merely conceptual fictions

One recent interpreter has said that '[t]he Buddhist Reductionist [i.e. Vasubandhu] claims that "person" is a mere convenient designator for a complex causal series of impermanent, impersonal psychological elements. That is, ultimately there are no persons, only physical objects, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousness.'[30] Another interpreter has said, however, that '[w]e need to realize that Vasubandhu does not reject the view that persons ultimately exist. For he too believes that conventionally real persons ultimately exist by reason of being the same in existence as collections of aggregates.'[31] Vasubandhu himself says, famously, that 'persons are real with reference to conception, real in the same sense that such things as heaps and streams are'.[32] The distinction between what is real with reference to conception (*prañjapti-sat*) and what is real substantially (*dravya-sat*) is one I will return to in the next section, where I will argue that it is a distinction between two concepts of objectivity (and therefore not

[29] Accusing another Buddhist of having a view that implied a denial of persons is a common enough dialectical tactic among Buddhists; see Duerlinger, *Indian Theories of Persons*, pp. 9, 23.

[30] Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003), pp. 24–5.

[31] James Duerlinger, *Indian Theories of Persons*, p. 21.

[32] *prajñapti-sat pudgalo rāśidhārādivat. Abhidharmakośabhāṣya,* p. 1205.

a distinction between the subjective and the objective, or between mere appearance and reality). Vasubandhu's claim sounds, in any case, pretty good for persons. Heaps are made out of grains, but are real nevertheless; streams are made out of water, but are still streams. Vasubandhu does not seem to mean that persons are *merely* conceptual, that they are internal or subjective fictions. He seems to mean that reference to them is supported by a concept-mediated, fluid and aggregative model of classification, that the delimitation of the psycho-physical raw materials out of which persons are made into individual streams is not simply a matter of cutting nature at its own hard natural joints. In fact, Vasubandhu does not say either that persons are 'ultimately real' (*dravya-sat*), or that they are not ultimately real; and his silence is well-motivated. For to ask of something which has been agreed to be constituted out of other things whether it 'really' exists or not seems to be one of those questions Parfit describes as *empty*: we are in possession of all the facts; there is no further fact of the sort the question seems to ask for.

It has been suggested that the import of his statement is that the term 'person' is, for Vasubandhu, a fictional term, and indeed that persons are merely for him conceptual fictions. We have already seen some of the difficulties that translation of the word *saṅketa* has given rise to, and similar difficulties accompany the word *prajñapti*. This word is rendered as 'nominal' by Stcherbatsky and Matilal, 'conventional' by Duerlinger, 'relative' by Poussin, 'conceptual' by Kapstein and 'convenient designator' by Siderits. Stcherbatsky's translation leads him to represent Vasubandhu as thinking that persons are merely nominal entities, and the translation of *prajñapti* as 'convenient designator' clearly runs the same risk.[33] If 'person' is a *mere* name, like 'Hamlet' or 'the hare's horn', then it does not have a real referent, and persons are illusions of language and conception. It is a short step from there to agreeing with Hume that some fiction is involved. (In the next chapter, I will argue that Candrakīrti does indeed think that the term 'self' lacks a reference, but *his* reason is that the term is not a referring expression at all; it has a quite different linguistic role.)

Does the claim that the reality of persons is dependent on concepts imply that persons are mere fictions? The idea, that because a term is relative to our interests and ways of classifying it is also a fiction, is reminiscent of a view

[33] Kapstein discusses the problems with Stcherbatsky's translation; *Reason's Traces*, p. 348.

associated with the early Nietzsche. Nietzsche claimed that language and concepts never reach the truth, because all concepts are merely abstractions from sense-data, and all words are but arbitrary assignments:

> If truth alone had been the deciding factor in the genesis of language, and if the standpoint of certainty had been decisive for designations, then how could we still dare to say 'the stone is hard,' as if 'hard' were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation! We separate things according to gender, designating the tree as masculine and the plant as feminine. What arbitrary assignments! How far this oversteps the canons of certainty! We speak of a 'snake': this designation touches only upon its ability to twist itself and could therefore also fit a worm. What arbitrary differentiations! What one-sided preferences, first for this, then for that property of a thing! The various languages placed side by side show that with words it is never a question of truth, never a question of adequate expression.[34]

Nietzsche also said that 'truth is an illusion we have forgotten is an illusion',[35] that we can come to *know* that our concepts fictionalize and distort the real nature of things, the implication being that we can somehow sneak round the side of the veil of ideas and compare our conceptual scheme with reality perceived from some impartial vantage point. What the early Nietzsche forgot is that our concepts might be the *only* window we have on reality; there is no catching them from the side on. And so, as Bernard Williams says, 'it is trivially true that "snake" is a human concept, a cultural product. But it is a much murkier proposition that its use somehow *falsifies* reality—that "in itself" the world does not contain snakes, or indeed anything else you might mention.'[36] Similarly here; even if person is a human concept, a human-centred way of grouping and classifying experience, it would not follow that 'in itself' the world does not contain such things as persons, that a person is 'an illusion we have forgotten is an illusion'. The Buddhists need concur with Nietzsche only partly in his saying that 'there is no "being" behind doing, effecting, becoming; "the doer" is merely a fiction

[34] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Truth and lies in the non-moral sense', in Daniel Breazeale, ed. and trans., *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1979), pp. 79–91; see esp. p. 81–2.

[35] 'Truth and lies', p. 84.

[36] Bernard Williams, *Truth & Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 17. See also Maudemarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

added to the deed—the deed is everything'.[37] They might say that the doer *is* the deed. Nor indeed need they say that because there is something human-centred in what we decide to count as a heap, it follows that heaps are 'merely fictions'.[38] Indeed it is their Nyāya critics who are the ones persistently to press these Buddhists into an admission that the identity of persons is, for them, an illusion like that of the circle of light generated by a swinging lamp. This is a pressure they just as consistently resist. Their insistence on the objectivity of persons, albeit different in kind from that of more fundamental sorts of entity, is unwavering. The admitted fact that persons are not objective in some absolute sense (*paramārtha-sat*) does not preclude their having objectivity in some other degree (*saṃvṛti-satya*).

The idea behind the claim that persons are mere fictions is that the person is the sort of illusion which results from standing too far back from the facts of personal identity, namely the psycho-physical stream, just as a cloud or a table looks from a distance like a solid object, but dissolves into vapour or atoms on closer inspection. When it comes to settling questions about what there really is in the world, the assumption is that the 'view from close up' is the proper one to assume. We do not, however, typically regard clouds and tables as optical illusions simply because they disappear when we zoom in. Why should we not say, to the reverse, that when we look at an impressionist painting close up and see only dots of colour, the *disappearance* of the painting is the illusion and the 'real' painting is the one seen from far off? It is for such reasons as these that we need to find a different anchor for the distinction invoked by Vasubandhu.

6.4 The objectivity of person-involving conceptual schemes

Vasubandhu himself has something more to say about the imperfect reality of persons. Something is real in the cloaking and concealing (*samvṛti-sat*) or conceptual (*prajñapti-sat*) sense if it is no longer cognized when it is divided, either physically or in the mind. Something is real in the ultimate

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 45.

[38] For an argument against the elimination of persons but in favour of the elimination of objects, however: Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

(*paramārtha-sat*) or foundational (*dravya-sat*) sense if it is still cognized even when so divided. We must remember, while reading his explanation, that in Vasubandhu's world-view, everything is constituted out of primitive 'components' or elemental 'qualities' (*dharma*), some of which are physical (*rūpa*) and others psychological (*nāma*):

That of which one does not have a cognition when it has been broken is real in a concealing way (*samvṛti-sat*); an example is a pot. And that of which one does not have a cognition when other [elemental qualities (*dharma*)] have been excluded from it by the mind is also conventionally real; an example is water. That which is otherwise is ultimately real (*paramārtha-sat*).

(AK 6.4)

Vasubandhu elaborates:

That of which one does not have a cognition when it has been broken into parts is real in the concealing way. An example is a pot, for when a pot is broken into shards, one does not have a cognition of it. And that of which one does not have a cognition when other elemental qualities (*dharma*) have been excluded (*apohya*) by the intellect (*buddhi*) is also to be known as real in the concealing way. An example is water, for when one mentally excludes its [physical] form (*rūpa*) and so on, one has no cognition of water. That is, the 'concealing' designation is applied to those things such as pots and water. Hence, when we say, within the scope of the concealing, 'There is a water-jug and water,' we have spoken the truth (*satyam*); we have not uttered a falsehood. Hence, it is called a 'concealing truth.'

The existence of things in a way other than that is ultimate reality. That of which one still has a cognition even when it has been broken is ultimately real. And that of which one still has a cognition even when other elemental qualities are mentally excluded is also ultimately real. An example is [physical] form (*rūpa*). For when that form is broken into infinitesimal particles, one still has a cognition of that real thing (*vastu*) [namely, form]. And when other elemental qualities such as taste are mentally excluded, one still has a cognition of that whose nature is form. One should see that this is also the case with sensation (*vedanā*) and so on. Something is said to be ultimately real [or true (*satyam*)] because it exists ultimately.[39]

[39] *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, ed. P. Pradhan and revised by Aruna Haldar (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), p. 334. Trans. John Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004), p. 41, slightly modified. See also B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 246–7; John B. Buescher, *Echoes from an Empty Sky: The Origins of the Buddhist Doctrine of the Two Truths* (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), pp. 70–2. Poussin notes that the Chinese translator Paramārtha again departs

These definitions suggest that what is really at issue is not so much the existence of social practices or conventional fabrications, but what we might call 'stability under analysis'. An impressionist painting ceases to represent anything when investigated too closely: the perceptual image is *unstable* under investigation. Vasubandhu introduces this idea in a slightly strange way. The problem is that, while we can well enough understand the way in which a pot is no longer perceived when it is divided into pieces, the argument does not work for water, which, being a sort of stuff, can be divided up without disappearing. So Vasubandhu says that things like water disappear from cognitive view when they are divided up *in the mind*. The text here, however, is ambiguous: does he have in mind a mental division of water *into* further constituents, or a mental division of water *from* other things; and, if the latter, is the idea that water is mentally divided from things other than water, or is the idea rather that water is divided from its own properties? I think the first reading has to be the correct one. On the second reading, I divide water from things other than water, but there is no reason to think that I thereby lose my cognitive grip on water; in fact, just the opposite—distinguishing a thing from what it is not is a way to individuate it in thought.[40] The last reading will mean that Vasubandhu is giving an argument similar to Aristotle's 'stripping argument' (*Metaphysics* 7.3). I try to imagine the thing without first one and then another of its properties, until eventually I find I am not thinking about anything at all. The trouble is that, on that interpretation, the definitions simply don't connect with the discussion about the composition of persons, and their putative reduction to streams.[41] Vasubandhu's argument, as I take it, is not that we cannot retain our grasp of the idea of a person if in thought we

from the original, with 'Things like "a pot" exist only as a metaphorical designation (*prajñapti*) of shape.' Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, English trans. Leo M. Pruden, vol. III, p. 1045, n. 43.

[40] It is true that Vasubandhu seems to allude to a standard Buddhist theory of conceptual analysis, the so-called 'exclusion from others' (*anyāpoha*), a technique used to explain both the hierarchical arrangement of concepts and the semantic reach of general terms. The term 'tree', for example, excludes from its semantic range other kinds of vegetation, as well as animals, minerals, and so on, but not oaks, elms, and so on. However, that theory was only developed in this form by his successor, Dignāga.

[41] Matilal does see a 'stripping' argument here: 'We cannot have any awareness (perceptual) of the water-body, if we strip it of all the sensible and other properties,' *Perception*, p. 246. But he then muddies the water, saying that 'the designata of such mass terms ... are cognitively or conceptually analysable into fundamental qualities or quality-atoms. When such qualities are taken away by analytic process, nothing substantial remains.' Ibid., pp. 247–8. So he seems to see two distinct kinds of conceptual analysis in play. In support of the reading I prefer: Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan*

strip away all the properties associated with being a person, but rather that the person slips out of cognitive focus when we 'zoom in' and divide the person, in thought, into the component elements of the stream. In fact, however, there is a simple reason why Vasubandhu's argument looks like a 'stripping argument', and that is that the basic Abhidharma ontology is an ontology of tropes or property-particulars. So dividing something into its constituents just is a matter of dissolving it into its (particular) properties.[42]

In the *Simile of the Lute* in the Saṃyutta Nikāya, the story is told of a minister who hears the sound of a lute for the first time, and who is entranced by it. He asked first for the lute to be brought to him; but then he asks for the sound *by itself*. When he is told that it is the various parts of the lute together with the effort of the musician that give off the sound, the minister breaks the lute into pieces, splinters each of the pieces, burns all the splinters and scatters the ashes in a strong wind. 'A poor thing indeed is this that they call a lute,' he says. Explaining the simile, the Buddha said: 'So too, bhikkhus, as [a bhikkhu] investigates [the *skandha*], whatever notions of "I" or "mine" or "I am" had occurred to him before no longer occur to him.'[43] Without this explanation, the simile might seem to suggest that there is a relation of ontological dependence between the sound and the parts of the lute; but the Buddha's interpretation makes of it rather a conceptual dependence: when one investigates a person into their component *skandha*, the concept of an 'I' falls away.

Vasubandhu's statement that persons are 'real with reference to conception' is to be taken as saying that one can think in a person-involving way only as long as one does not analyse or 'mentally divide' the person into a flow of experience. As soon as one entertains the analysis, one no longer thinks in terms of a conceptual scheme that involves persons; one no longer sees the world that way. So Vasubandhu's view is not that there are no persons, but that person-involving conceptual schemes are unstable, in the sense defined. Putting the matter this way would certainly explain why the Buddha is held to think that philosophical knowledge can lead to

Madhyamaka Defence. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon (1998), p. 117; 'On the abhidharma ontology', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9 (1981): 227–57 at pp. 237–8.

[42] Vasubandhu says of water, that in its common use, the term 'water' designates (particular) colours and shapes (AK 1.13), that is, *rūpa*. Its uncommon use is, of course, to denote one of the four primary elements (*mahābhūta*).

[43] Saṃyutta Nikāya iv 197–8. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1254.

transformation—knowledge of the analytical reduction of persons results, if this claim is correct, in a reorientation of mind, a switch in perspective from a person-involving to an impersonal conceptual scheme.

The Buddhists' Nyāya critics urge that the Buddhist concept of a person is like the idea we form of a single continuous circle of light when we see a rapidly circling torch. They ascribe to the Buddhists the view that a person is the cognitive equivalent of an optical illusion. I think, however, that Vasubandhu's understanding of the relationship between the impersonal and the person-involving conceptual schemes enables him to resist that pressure.[44] I have already mentioned J. L. Austin's observation that it is in general a mistake to treat reflections as if they are illusions, for, unless there is some devious mirror-work involved, they are perfectly normal parts of everyday experience. This is so even though reflections are conditional on facts about the observer, such as his or her position. Amartya Sen has argued, in a similar spirit, that adopting an objective view does not require that the interpreter seek to assume what Thomas Nagel has called the 'view from nowhere'. There is, he claims, a clear sense in which positional views—views from somewhere—achieve objectivity.[45] To give a simple analogy, an observation that the sun and moon appear the same size is objective (that is, true for any observer, irrespective of subjective differences between observers), but positional (dependent on the observer's having a certain position in space, on the earth's surface). It would be quite wrong to describe the observation as an illusion. In other words, we need to be able to distinguish between positionality and subjectivity; not every perception or concept that depends on *subject-specific* parameters is to be assimilated to a *subjective* illusion.[46]

[44] For a similar comment, see also John B. Buescher, *Echoes from an Empty Sky*, pp. 61–2. The view of Vasubandhu's critical commentator Saṃghabhadra (*c*.380 CE), author of the *Nyāyānusāra*, should also be considered. It seems that Saṃghabhadra was firmer about this than Vasubandhu himself. The *Nyāyānusāra* is extant only in Chinese; for discussion see Louis de la Vallée Poussin, 'Documents d'Abhidharma', *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême-orient* 30 (1930): 247–98; Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories of Existence* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995).

[45] See Amartya Sen, 'Positional objectivity', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22 (1993): 126–45.

[46] There is a further distinction, within the category of the positionally objective, between positionally objective illusions, like the bent-stick or the mirage, and positionally objective non-illusory observations. This distinction would be drawn formally by certain Mādhyamika authors, who distinguish two varieties of conventional truth (*saṃvṛti-satya*), one 'objective' or 'real' (*tathya*), the other 'erroneous' (*mithyā*). See Malcolm Eckel, *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction between the Two Truths: An Eighth Century Handbook of Madhyamaka Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 75, 123 n. 41; C. W. Huntington, 'The system of the two truths in the *Prasannapadā*

There is another reason to distance the idea of that which is 'real with reference to conception' from the idea of an illusion. It is well known that experience displays a certain resistance to, or 'independence' from, belief. The experience of an illusion persists even when it is known to be an illusion. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, for example, the experience of one line as longer than the other is not dispelled even when the subject measures the lines for themselves. Similarly, the effect of a *trompe l'oeil* can survive the discovery that it is a trick of clever paintwork; the same is true of half-immersed sticks seen as bent. This is what Gareth Evans has called the 'belief-independence' of informational states: 'the subject's being in an informational state is independent of whether or not he believes that the state is veridical'.[47] If Vasubandhu is right in his analysis, however, then positionally objective ways of thinking differ from illusions in just this respect. The switch to a view from nowhere undermines positionally objective ways of thinking.

Those ways of thinking are, nevertheless, real ways of thinking (ways of thinking about what is real); they are not merely subjective. They are real, but they are not ideal—the problem with these ways of thinking about the world is not that they are false, but that they are flawed, imperfect. The existence of much better ways to think, these Buddhists say, does not falsify the ways we do habitually think. The point is lost if we are tempted to look at the distinction between the 'two truths' after the fashion of Plato's cave. The distinction between the 'two truths' is not a distinction between reality and mere appearance, or between fact and fiction. It is a distinction between better and worse but nevertheless objective ways of thinking.[48] We are not in error when we think of the world in a person-involving way; it is just that we could do better—ethically better—by thinking of it in some other way altogether, by standing in a different cognitive relationship with the world. One implication of the distinction is that the organization

and the *Madhyamakāvatāra*: a study in Mādhyamika soteriology', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 11 (1983): 77–106.

[47] Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 123.

[48] There are many other attempts to draw the distinction in the Indian Buddhist literature. Dharmakīrti (PV 2.3) provides a definition of the distinction that is in marked contrast with that of Vasubandhu (AK 6.4). He says that only the ultimately real is capable of causal influence, all the rest is merely *saṃvṛti-sat*. We have examined Candrakīrti's definition (under MK 24.8), and Śāntideva's (BCA 9.2), in earlier chapters. See also Mervyn Sprung (ed.), *The Problem of Two Truths in Buddhism and Vedānta* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1973); John B. Buescher, *Echoes from an Empty Sky*, pp. 55–83.

of experience into persons is artificial rather than natural, that it has the character more of an achievement rather than a given, and that it is at least notionally within our power, and so within the orb of moral concern, *not* to organize and divide experience that way. Bringing persons within the realm of human achievement opens a possibility that is unavailable to the metaphysicians of self: that it might be better not to classify experience that way; indeed, that it might be better not to classify experience any way at all.

6.5 Two problems for Vasubandhu's Reductionism

Criticisms of Reductionism in recent literature have concentrated on the problem of showing that the concept of a stream of experience is either conceptually or ontologically prior to that of a person. I will examine some of these arguments further in the next chapter. In this section I want to look at two problems that arose for Vasubandhu within the Indian literature, problems respectively to do with the notions of ownership and causal sequence. In the next section I will consider two arguments, again from the Indian literature, that there must be more to someone than a stream.

An objection to any reduction of the idea of person to that of causally connected flow of experience appears to follow from considerations of ownership. Consider what is involved in the idea of ownership, specifically in the idea that we own our experiences. The question is whether facts about ownership can be reduced to facts about causal connection. It happens that Vasubandhu himself considers just such an objection to the Reductionist view.

> If a self does not exist, [they ask,] *whose* is this memory? [They say that] the meaning of the use of the genitive case [indicated by the use of 'whose'] is ownership. It [the self] is the owner of a memory in the way that Caitra owns a cow. [In their view,] a cow cannot be used for milking or for carrying anything [by someone] and so on unless it is owned [by them].[49]

Vasubandhu's way of dealing with the objection is less than convincing. He asks us to consider what is meant in saying that Caitra owns a cow,

[49] *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, p. 1217; trans,. Duerlinger, *Indian Theories of Persons*, pp. 97–8; cf. Kapstein, *Reason's Traces*, p. 368.

and his answer is that it is just a matter of causal connections between two streams, the stream that is Caitra and the stream that is the cow:

> [In your example,] what is called 'Caitra' is called the owner of a cow because we are aware of a single continuum of a collection of [phenomena] causally conditioning [other] phenomena [within the same continuum] and assume a causal connection to the occurrence of changes of place of, and alterations in, the cow. But there is no one thing called 'Caitra,' or a cow. Therefore there is no relation between the owner and what it owns over and above that between a cause and its effect.

This rejoinder fails to meet the point of the objection: it is true that because Caitra owns the cow, it is he and nobody else who milks it and carries things with it; but these facts are not what his ownership of the cow consists in. Later Nyāya philosophers who analysed the notion of being owned (*svatva*) said that it consists in the capacity of the object to be used as one wishes (*yatheṣṭhaviniyogayojyatva*).[50] But a capacity might go unexercised, so there may be no causal connections corresponding to it. What about the idea that we own our own experiences? I do not mean by this simply the idea that experiences must belong to an owner, that is, a subject of experience. The view described by Strawson as the 'no-ownership' view denies this, but Strawson rightly found it unintelligible.[51] The view I have in mind is that I own my experiences in the way Caitra owns his cow, and that I have capacities with regard to them that nobody else has, even if those capacities are never exercised.[52] For example, I have the capacity to stop having one of my experiences, perhaps, by shutting my eyes during a particularly

[50] For a review of the later theory: J. Duncan M. Derrett, 'An Indian contribution to the study of property', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 18 (1956): 486–98; esp. pp. 481–3. The metaphysical status of property was the cause of a major controversy in the seventeenth century, between realists, following the precedent of Raghunātha Śiromaṇi, who held that it 'had an objective reality of its own independently of a particular individual's consciousness', and anti-realists, who thought instead that it 'was a special figment or condition of the brain, and that without consciousness of ownership ... property did not exist' (Derrett; the terminology is mine). According to the realists, the facts of ownership are irreducible: *svatva* is its own *padārtha*. According to the anti-realists, the facts of ownership are judgement-dependent. Ethan Kroll is editing and translating the principal textual sources.

[51] Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 95–8.

[52] On the phenomenology of 'having': Richard Zaner, *The Problem of Embodiment* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), esp. pp. 21–35; Gabriel Marcel, 'Outlines of a phenomenology of having', in *Being and Having*, trans. Katharine Farrer (London: Dacre Press, 1949); see also his *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Rockliff, 1952).

gruesome episode in a film. The objection is that the Reductionist lacks the resources to make sense of this notion of capacity, right or entitlement. Nor is it easy to see how the Reductionist can explain a *disanalogy* between ownership of experiences and ownership of property, namely that I do not have the power of transfer with regard to the experiences I own.

Another problem for Vasubandhu's position[53] is due to the later Vaiśeṣika philosopher, Śrīdhara (*c*.990 CE). He says that if Reductionism were true, then we could form no *conception* of causal sequence. The claim is that the very possibility of having a notion of causal sequence—and this is of course a notion to which the Reductionist is absolutely committed—requires that Reductionism is false.

[Buddhist:] As a result of there being a causal connection, a later memory [is a memory] of what was experienced at an earlier moment. The son does not, however, remember what was experienced by the father; this is because there is no causal connection between the cognitions of father and son, and their bodies, though admittedly so [connected], are not [themselves constituted of] consciousness.

[Śrīdhara:] This is not well-reasoned, for in the absence of self, there would be no determinate notion (*niścaya*) of a causal connection. At the time of the cause, the effect has yet to occur, and when its time comes, the cause has gone. Aside from the two of them, some unitary perceiver is denied; so who would observe the causal connection between those two things occurring in sequence?[54]

Śrīdhara's argument is that in order to form the idea of causal sequence I must be able to experience sequences of events *as sequences*. But if Reductionism were true, there would be just flows of fleeting experience, and no one experience would be in a position to witness a drawn-out sequence of events. In other words, if Reductionism were true, it would be inconceivable. But it is conceivable; therefore it is false. If Śrīdhara is right, then Hume is more consistent than Parfit, for Hume said both that persons are mere bundles of experience and that there are no real causal

[53] For still further critical analysis: Oetke, '*Ich' und das Ich*, pp. 194–242.

[54] *Praśastapādabhāṣyam of Praśastapāda with the commentary Nyāyakaṇḍalī by Śrīdhara Bhaṭṭa*, ed. Durgādhara Jhā (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1997), p. 170. The Kashmiri Naiyāyika Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (*c*.850–910 CE) argues similarly against the Buddhists on the grounds that there must be temporally extended but single perceptions; the argument is found in his play, the *Āgamaḍambara* 1.170. Csaba Dezsö (ed. and trans.), *Much Ado About Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), p. 76.

connections. If Śrīdhara is right, we must either be fully Humean, or else be fully Realist; there is no middle way.[55]

6.6 The soul's footprints

Hume said that when he 'entered most intimately' into what he called himself, all he observed were perceptions. From this he concluded that there is nothing to the self and that there is only the bundled perceptions. Buddhists share the view that introspection never leads to the discovery of a self: no matter how hard we look into ourselves, no self is ever found. There are only continuous streams, which we can, if we wish, refer to as persons. Indian philosophers belonging to the Nyāya school draw a very different conclusion from the same introspective experiment, however. They say that even if the self is not an object of knowledge through perception (*pratyakṣa*), there is no reason at all why its existence should not be derived as the conclusion of a rational inference (*anumāna*). They are happy, indeed, to elicit the help of the Upaniṣads themselves in support of their claim that the soul is an object of rational deliberation. The specific scriptural text they cite is BĀ 4.5.6: 'it is one's self ... on which one should reflect ... (*ātma vā are ... mantavyo ...*)'—a scriptural defence of the use of reason ahead of scripture in the rediscovery of self![56]

What, then, are the signs of the self? What are the soul's footprints? One argument is that mental qualities like pain, pleasure, desire and consciousness point to a substratum, and that substratum is proved by elimination to be

[55] Substantially the same argument is also to be found in one of Śrīdhara's contemporaries, the Kashmiri Śaiva philosopher Rāmakaṇṭha (*c.*950–1000 CE). See his *Nareśvaraparīkṣāprakāśa*, ed. M. K. Shastri (Srinagar: Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies, vol. XLV, 1926). pp. 71–2. I am grateful to Christopher Bartley and Alex Watson for this information. See further Alex Watson, *The Self's Awareness of Itself: Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha's Arguments against the Buddhist Doctrine of No-Self* (Vienna: Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 2007), chapter 4. Ratnakīrti (*c.*1070 CE), for the Buddhists, attempts a response in his *Kṣaṇabhaṅgasiddhi*: a momentary cognition represents itself as having been produced by another earlier one. See Haraprasad Shastri (ed.), *Six Buddhist Nyāya Tracts in Sanskrit* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1989), p. 32. For discussion: Satkari Mookerjee, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), pp. 66–8. Ratnakīrti repeats the argument in another of his works, the *Santānāntaraduṣaṇa*, a work in which he is led to the conclusion that there are no apparent boundaries between streams, and so in fact no distinct streams at all (see below, chapter 7).

[56] See, for example, Gaṅgeśa, *Muktivāda*, in V. P. Dvivedi et al. (eds), *Gādādharī*, vol. 2 (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1970), p. 2055.

different from any non-mental substance.[57] But it is not yet given that pains and the rest are *qualities*; this is, again, the question of whether the flow of experience is conceptually and/or ontologically dependent on a self. A second argument is that moral responsibility demands that the one who commits the crime also takes the punishment.[58] But how things are downstream can be influenced by what has happened upstream, even for a river-self. We need a better sign of selfhood, and the Nyāya philosophers think they have found it in the manifest ability of a conscious subject to integrate the deliverances of the various sense-modalities. 'Because of touch and sight,' concisely asserts *Nyāya-Sūtra* 3.1.1, meaning that because through touch and sight the self-same object is perceived, and perceived *as the same*, there must be a single, unitary perceiver. Even this idea might have its origins in the Upaniṣads: 'And who is the god that joins the sight and hearing?' asks Kena Upaniṣad 1d.[59] The very suggestive idea of the Nyāya is that the soul's footprint is the 'mental integration' (*pratisandhāna*) of the perceptions. The point at issue, as Vātysāyana (*c*.450 CE) makes clear, is whether the relationship between a subject and their experiences is one of constitutive dependence, as between a tree and its roots, branches, and so on; or a relationship between one object and a distinct object that depends on it, as between chopping and an axe (*Bhāṣya* under NS 3.1.1).

The idea that the self is that which looks out upon the world through the various senses, as if through different windows in a room, has a long history. When the Buddhist monk Nāgasena asks Milinda to explain what this 'soul' is that he keeps going on about, Milinda replies:

> The life-principle (*jīva*) within that sees material shape with the eye, hears sound with the ear, smells smell with the nose, tastes flavour with the tongue, feels touch with the body, and discriminates mental states with the mind. Just as we who are sitting here in the palace can look out of whichever window we want to look

[57] *Nyāya-Sūtra* 1.1.10. *Gautamīyanyāyadarśana with Bhaṣya of Vātsyāyana*, critical ed. Anantalal Thakur (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1997).

[58] Vātsyāyana's *Bhāṣya* under NS 1.1.1; Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*, ed. S. N. Shukla (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series No. 106, 1936). See also Appendix B.

[59] Compare Brentano: 'When a person is aware of seeing and hearing, he is also aware that he is doing both at the same time. Now if we find the perception of seeing in one thing and the perception of hearing in another, in which of these things do we find the perception of their simultaneity? Obviously, in neither of them. It is clear, rather, that the inner cognition of one and the inner cognition of the other must belong to the same real unity.' Franz Brentano, *Psychology From an Empirical Standpoint* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 160.

out of—the east, west, north or the south window—even so, revered sir, this life-principle within can look out of whichever door it wants to look out of.[60]

Praśastapāda (*c.*530 CE) likewise speaks of it being 'as if looking out through two windows, a single perceiver for both'.[61] An idea similar to this one, that the streams of perceptions from the various senses must 'converge', is to be found in Plato:

It would be terrible, my boy, if there were many senses seated in us as if in Trojan horses, rather than all these things converging on some single form, whether that be soul, or whatever one should call it, by which we perceive all the sensibles through the senses as instruments.

(*Theaetetus* 184D; trans. Richard Sorabji)

The Nyāya philosophers (especially Vātsyāyana, Uddyotakara, Vācaspati and Udayana) argue, somewhat in the style of Kant, that certain judgements would not be possible if there were no unitary subject upon which the various streams of psychological experience ontologically depended.[62] To make their point for them, suppose that, rather than windows, the room contains several DVD displays, each one displaying a rolling stream of images. How could it ever be judged that the displays are showing the same film, simultaneously or out of synch, unless there was something in the room other than the streams of images themselves? So Vātsyāyana says:

A certain object is grasped by sight, and that same object is also grasped by touch. And, it is judged: 'that which I saw with my visual sense, I now touch with my tactile sense;' and: 'that which I touched with my tactile sense, I now see with my visual sense.' Here two perceptions of a single object are combined as having a unitary agent, and not as ones whose agent is a [mere] aggregate.

(*Bhāṣya* under NS 3.1.1)

[60] *Milinda-pañhā* 2.3.6; trans. I. B. Horner, *Milinda's Questions* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1996), p. 76.

[61] PB, para. 78, last line. I use the enumeration of the text in Johannes Bronkhorst and Yves Ramseier, *Word Index to the Praśastapādabhāṣya* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1994).

[62] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A106–8, B139–40. See: Christine Korsgaard, 'Personal identity and the unity of agency: a Kantian response to Parfit,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989): 101–32; Simon Blackburn, 'Has Kant refuted Parfit?', in Jonathan Dancy (ed.), *Reading Parfit* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 180–201; Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997). As Parfit formulates it, Kant's transcendental argument purports to prove only that we must believe ourselves to be selves identical over time, not that we in fact are; see *Reasons and Persons*, p. 225. The Nyāya version of the argument seems, at least at first, to be more ambitious.

I think that this idea has something to be said for it, and in a longer discussion elsewhere, I have distinguished three versions of the argument.[63] According to the first version of the argument, what needs to be explained is one's capacity, having once seen an object, to *re-identify* that same object by touch alone. According to the second, what needs to be explained is one's capacity to identify an object touched as the same as an object *simultaneously* seen. According to the third version of the argument, what needs to be explained is one's capacity to *think* of one's perceptions in different modalities as perceptions of one and the same object. The first version, I believe, appeals to an explanans insufficiently distinct from the explanandum. The second version falsely assumes a model of the senses as effecting a *division* in the input of sensory information. The third version is a stronger argument to a weaker conclusion: it seems to establish only that one must *conceive of oneself* as the numerically identical owner of one's experiences if one is capable of cross-modal comparisons. That conclusion is in agreement with recent work in developmental psychology claiming to show that an infant's cross-modal capacities are essentially implicated in their development of a sense of self.[64]

The Mīmāṃsā philosophers Śabara and Kumārila claim to find still another footprint of the soul. They argue that one recognizes oneself in the irreducibly first-personal content of one's memories of past experiences. Śabara says:

When a thing has been seen on one day, the notion 'I saw this' arises on a later day. And this refers to an inner self (*pratyagātmani*), nothing else. For the present [aggregate] is different from the one that saw [the thing] earlier. Hence, there is

[63] 'Cross-modality and the self', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 61.3 (2000): 639–58. For discussion of the Nyāya argument: Arindam Chakrabarti, 'I touch what I saw', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52/1 (1992): 103–17; B. K. Matilal, 'The perception of self in Indian tradition', in Roger T. Ames et al.(eds), *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), p. 289; Wilhelm Halbfass, *On Being and What There Is: Classical Vaiśeṣika and the History of Indian Ontology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 104–5; Karin Preisendanz, *Studien zu Nyāyasūtra III.1 mit dem Nyāyatattvāloka Vācaspatimiśras II* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1994).

[64] Andrew Meltzoff: 'Foundations for developing a concept of self', in Dante Cicchetti and Marjorie Beeghly (eds), *The Self in Transition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); 'The role of imitation in understanding persons and developing a theory of mind', in Simon Baron-Cohen, Helen Tager-Flusberg and Donald Cohen (eds), *Understanding Other Minds: Perspectives from Autism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); 'Molyneux's babies: cross-modal perception, imitation, and the mind of the preverbal infant', in Naomi Eilan et al. (eds), *Spatial Representation: Problems in Philosophy and Psychology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

something besides [the aggregate] to which this word 'I' applies .... [Here,] we do not consider the word 'I' that we employ to be the means for inferring another thing [besides the aggregate]. Rather, we consider the experience of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*), which goes beyond the word [to be the means for inferring].[65]

Kumārila rehearses the argument in the *Ślokavārttika, Ātmavāda* 5.18.107 ff. He argues further that one's recognition of oneself in such recollected experiences is indefeasible.[66] (Rāmānuja, along with some of the Nyāya philosophers, formulates the weaker argument from object-recognition, and directs it specifically against a punctilinear conception of individual perdurance.[67]) John Taber has pointed out the striking parallel between this Mīmāṃsā appeal to self-recognition and the argument put by Reid and Butler against Locke's memory criterion, an argument that has been rehabilitated more recently by Sidney Shoemaker. Shoemaker states that self-recognition is, in his phrase, 'immune to error through mis-identification':

[W]hen I know on the basis of memory that I did so-and-so in the past, it is not the case that I remember *someone* doing that thing and identify that person as myself by what I remember about him .... [W]hen I say 'I have an itch,' or 'I think so-and-so,' it is not the case that I know this because I observe *somebody* having an itch, and identify that person as myself.[68]

If I look through a complex series of distorting mirrors at my own face, it is at least possible that I might see a face and fail to recognize that it is mine—I may fail to identify the face as my own. But, Shoemaker says, recognizing one's own experiences and memories 'from the inside' is immune to that sort of mistake. It is impossible that I might experience a

[65] *Śabara, Mīmāṃsāsūtrabhāṣya*, E. Frauwallner (ed.), in *Materialien zur ältesten Erkenntnislehre der Karmamīmāṃsā* (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1968), p. 56; trans. John Taber, 'The Mīmāṃsā theory of self-recognition', *Philosophy East and West* 40 (1990): 35–57; at p. 37.

[66] Kumārila's argument is also examined in Oetke, '*Ich' und das Ich*, pp. 421–57.

[67] Rāmānuja, *Śrībhāṣya* I, 83–4: 'From [such judgements as] "I know", "I did know", "I the knower have now lost [this] knowledge" the origin, [duration and cessation] of consciousness are directly established. Whence their identity? If it were accepted that selfhood derived from the momentary consciousness [of separate acts], recognition [of the form] 'On one day this was seen by me and on the next day I saw it again' could not take place, for it is not possible for something cognized by one to be recognized by another.' (Trans. Lipner). See: Julius Lipner, *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 53.

[68] Sidney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 103. See also Sidney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964); *The First-Person Perspective and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

pain but wonder whether the pain is mine or someone else's. Similarly for memories of one's own experiences: it is impossible for me to remember a feeling of pain and still wonder whether it was my pain or someone else's.

Shoemaker draws another conclusion from this observation, one concerning the nature of self-awareness. He claims that when one is self-aware, one is not presented with oneself as an object at all, for if one were, the possibility that one might misidentify oneself could arise:

> It is essential to remembering one's past actions and experiences 'from the inside' that one's past self, the subject of those actions and experiences, does not enter into the content of one's memory in the way other persons do.

(The Mīmāṃsaka Prabhākara presents a similar argument: the self is self-aware qua grasper but not qua thing grasped.)[69] The problem for Kumārila, then, is to defend the claim that 'I' is a genuine referring expression *in conjunction* with the claim that self-avowals of the form 'I saw this' are indefeasible. It is also unclear whether his argument does succeed against Reductionism. For a Reductionist has no need to deny that there can be thoughts the *content* of which is irreducibly first-personal: that is consistent with the claim that the vehicle of those thoughts is reducible to a stream. Even a stream can entertain thoughts of the form 'I saw this', and such thoughts need not themselves be ascribed to a thinker.[70]

To Nyāya, Kumārila's Mīmāṃsā, and Rāmānuja's Vedānta, a Buddhist could reply as follows: 'The *sense of self* is indeed as you describe. To cure yourself of suffering you must abandon both it and everything that depends on it. In the state of nirvāṇa, there will be neither cross-modal judgements nor self-avowals nor object recognitions.' This move is *always* available.[71]

[69] His view is reported by Jayanta Bhaṭṭa in the *Nyāyamañjarī*, D. Sastri (ed.) (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series no. 106, 1934, Part II), pp. 5–7: *ātmā grāhakatayaiva prakāśyate, na grāhyatayeti*.

[70] See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 225; Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 183. Kant says the following: 'Although the dictum of certain ancient schools, that everything in the world is in a flux and nothing is permanent and abiding, cannot be reconciled with the admission of substances, it is not refuted by the unity of self-consciousness. For we are unable from our own consciousness to determine whether, as souls, we are permanent or not.' *Critique of Pure Reason* A364.

[71] It is not, however, a move they necessarily would or should make. The state of enlightenment cannot be identified with a *pathological* lack of sense of self, as is displayed in patients with Tourette's Syndrome, or the character described by Diderot in his play *Rameau's Nephew*. See also Tom Tillemans, 'What would it be like to be selfless? Hīnayānist and Mahāyanist versions, and Derek Parfit', The Numata Yehen Lecture in Buddhism, University of Calgary, Canada, 1995; *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 50 (1996): 835–52.

Our interest here is in which account gets the *sense of self* right.[72] What we will see in the next chapter is that some Buddhists offer an account of the sense of self quite different from any we have seen so far.

[72] The distinction David Velleman introduces between a theory of 'perspectival selfhood' and a theory of 'metaphysical identity' is helpful here. See his 'Self to self', *The Philosophical Review* 105 (1996): 39–76; reprinted in *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 193, n. 42 and p. 210, n. 53. Velleman argues that 'selfhood, defined perspectivally, cannot coincide with the identity of a person, since selfhood turns out to be asymmetric [in cases of fission] whereas relations of identity cannot'. Barry Dainton, however, defends the coincidence; see his *The Phenomenal Self* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). So, it seems, does Galen Strawson, whose 'transience' view is guided by the thought that a true theory of perspectival selfhood implies that there is no metaphysical identity over time; see his 'The self', in A. Beckermann and B. McLaughlin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). Our interest in the final chapter of this book is in a theory of perspectival selfhood freed from any requirement that it is also a theory of metaphysical identity.

7

Self as Performance

In a dissolving
world what certainties
for the self, whose identity
is its performance?

R. S. Thomas

7.1 Three readings of the 'no-self' thesis

Vasubandhu's is not the only way to explicate the Buddha's words. The Buddha's denial that there are real selves metaphysically distinct from continuous streams of psychological and physical occurrences lends itself, to be sure, to a reductionist interpretation; but the Pudgalavādins idea that there is an 'inexplicable' further fact about persons is also consistent with his many statements. The Buddha said, furthermore, that 'clinging' or 'attaching' is the fuel that feeds the fire that is the idea of me and mine. Some Buddhist philosophers take this to be the key insight—the definitive doctrine—in the Buddha's words, and out of it develop a new analysis of self, one of a self that is neither ontologically distinct from the psycho-physical stream, nor yet constituted by it.[1] In saying this, we must remember that two philosophical projects go on simultaneously under the 'No self!' banner: one to give a correct account of the concept of self as we have it; the other to argue that possession of that concept

[1] As observed above, the Abhidharma and Mādhyamika accounts might be seen as affording complementary analyses, respectively of the objective phenomenal self (the Jamesian 'me-self') and of selfhood as experienced from within (the 'I-self'). Irene Fast's psychoanalytic analysis of the second of these as an activity of 'selving' has noteworthy similarities with the Mādhyamika view; see her *Selving: A Relational Theory of Self Organization* (Hillsdale: Analytic Press, 1998).

is a source of moral ill (see §6.1). Any account of the concept of self that denies it to consist in that of an immaterial soul, any rejection of what Parfit calls the Cartesian View, might be described as a 'no-self' theory. So, likewise, might any theory that makes room for the idea that the concept of self, however analysed, has no place in a well-constituted mental life.

In this chapter, I will examine the ideas of three Mādhyamika Buddhist philosophers, Nāgārjuna (*c.*150 CE), Āryadeva (*c.*180 CE), and Candrakīrti (*c.*600–650 CE). Their interpretation of the 'No self!' slogan is, I believe, anti-Reductionist but irrealist: selves are not reducible to streams, but nor do they have a substantial existence distinct from the stream. With some of the pains and sufferings in the world, I seem nevertheless to hold myself in a special relationship: I think of them as *mine*. These philosophers argue that what this shows is that the idea of self is the idea of an activity (or deed, as Nietzsche put it). In a section towards the end of this chapter I will consider a philosopher from a different Buddhist tradition who argues, conversely, that there is no way coherently to draw a boundary between one flow of experience and another, between what's mine and what's yours. I will very briefly consider later discussion of the problem of individuation and the plurality of selves, before concluding with a Buddhist fable that helps us to understand how much of what seems to be mine I can afford to lose and still be me.

I will begin with a chart of the philosophical terrain. The language of self—use of personal pronouns, personal proper names and so forth—is, apparently, representational. That is to say, it appears to refer to, and make claims about entities of a certain kind, claims that are assessable as true or false, and whose truth or falsity is determined by the properties of the entities so referred to. Realism about selves is the thesis that appearances here are not deceptive: the terms in this discourse do indeed refer; moreover, assertions made within the discourse are, often, true, and when true, they are true because the entities so referred to do indeed have the properties ascribed to them. Reductionism has, historically, been a resource of those who would like to defend realism against a perceived threat of ontological proliferation. Reductionism is the thesis that statements in the disputed discourse, when true, are true because of the truth of statements in another discourse, one whose terms refer to entities whose status is less problematic. A committed naturalist, for example, who wants neither to admit selves into

their primitive ontology nor to write off all talk of selves as unintelligible, finds in the strategy of reduction the hope of a salvage operation: the statements of the language of self are made true by statements in the language of psycho-physical continuants. The motto of reductionism is 'realism *at no extra expense*!' (This is what Michael Dummett has called 'sophisticated' realism.)

As I noted in the last chapter, Parfit is no longer willing to describe reductionism about persons ('Reductionism') in terms of a commitment to the *impersonal description thesis*, the claim that 'though persons exist, we could give a *complete* description of reality *without* claiming that persons exist'.[2] If a description of reality which makes no reference to persons is able to formulate all the facts there are, then, if a language of persons is introduced, its utility, whatever that might be, will not consist in the description of some new domain of facts. The trouble with that formulation, as his critics have made clear, lies in finding a way to describe experiences and flows of experience that does not smuggle in the notion of a person—for example, as the bearer of an experience or as the principle of individuation of a flow of experience.

Let me consider that point in more detail. How might reductionism with regard to some domain of discourse be resisted? Broadly, there are three available anti-reductionist strategies. One is to show that the reducing terms (or their referents) inherit their 'shape', their principle of identity, from the terms being reduced. If there were no means to individuate distinct streams of psycho-physical elements without the use of personal proper names, the 'reduction' of the language of self into the language of streams would, though formally adequate, fail to be genuinely reductive. A second strategy is to show that the reducing item fails to do the explanatory work of the item being reduced. This strategy seeks to point out distinctive, perhaps non-causal, explanatory work done by the talk of selves. A third strategy hopes to demonstrate that the language being reduced exhibits an essential feature not present in the reducing language. For instance, the anti-reductionist might seek to show that there is an essentially perspectival and consequently subjective element in our talk of selves not captured within the imperspectival framework of physical science. These three strategies are respectively exemplified in the anti-reductionist arguments of

[2] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 212.

John Campbell,[3] Richard Sorabji[4] and Thomas Nagel.[5] Peter Strawson's well-known argument against what he calls the 'no-ownership' theory is itself a version of the first strategy.[6]

Reductionist propaganda notwithstanding, an anti-reductionist is not compelled to endorse substance dualism. Resistance, however, does incur a substantive obligation: to give an account of the relationship—let us call it the 'dependence' relationship—between talk of selves and talk of psycho-physical streams. That obligation exists for realists and irrealists alike. There are two paradigms here for irrealism. One concurs with the realist that the language of self is a language of referring terms, and of claims made true by the properties of entities so referred to. Where she departs from the realist is in her denial that there are, in fact, entities of the kind in question. This is an 'error theory' of the self: our talk of selves is representational but globally in error. There is nothing in the world for our personal proper names and pronouns to denote, nothing to make the statements about selves true: our discourse about ourselves is systematically mistaken. Terms like 'I' and 'you' are *empty* terms, of the same sort as 'phlogiston' or 'unicorn', and perhaps we can remain agnostic here about whether the statements in which they occur are all false or all neither-true-nor-false. The other irrealist paradigm rejects the assumption shared by the realist and the error-theoretic irrealist, the assumption that the language of self is genuinely representational. Both have been misled by the surface grammar of this language. In fact, statements about selves are not truth-apt at all, nor is their function to refer, and make claims about things so referred to. What is needed, say these 'non-factualist' irrealists about the self, is an explanation of the way we use the language of self freed from the mistaken assumption that it is a species of representational discourse. That is, it would be as it is in the prescriptivist and quasi-realist traditions in ethics, where the role of ethical statements is said not to *assert* anything, but to *express* a moral attitude and *prescribe* against specified modes of conduct.[7]

[3] John Campbell, *Past, Space, & Self* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), pp. 155–200.

[4] Richard Sorabji, *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

[5] Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[6] Peter F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 95–8.

[7] A third paradigm for irrealism is Dummett's semantic anti-realism, but it isn't clear to me that this paradigm is available in an account of the language of self. See, however, Mark Siderits, *Buddhist*

Even from this brief review of the terrain, it is clear that there are three distinct positions that a theorist working under the banner of 'No self!' might strike up. To be sure, she may be a reductionist, in which case the doctrine of 'no-self' is a thesis that there is no *sui generis* entity irreducible to a psycho-physical stream. But she could also be an error-theoretic irrealist, in which case she will read the slogan as a strict denial that there is anything to which the representational discourse of self refers. And she could be a non-factualist irrealist, opting to deny that the surface grammar of our talk of self is a fair guide to its true function. It is open, furthermore, for someone to be a reductionist in matters of metaphysical or personal identity but a non-reductionist about perspectival selfhood.[8]

Each of the three positions is, to some extent, in conflict with the pre-theoretic common-sense view of the self. Of the three, the first, reductionism, is the least revisionary. The reductionist's revolution leaves everything pretty much as it was before, subject to a little ontological spring-cleaning. In the last chapter, we saw that, among the Indians, the Abhidharma Buddhism of Vasubandhu (and also, perhaps more so, Saṃghabhadra) is reductionist about persons and error-theoretic about selves. The error-theorist is more revolutionary, for if the entire language of self rests on a massive mistake, in an ideal world it should surely be set aside altogether. The error-theorist owes us an explanation of how such a mistake came to be made, how talk of self can have a utility even if it is so colossally mistaken,[9] to what extent thought and talk about the self can be set aside, and what would be the consequences in doing so. In particular, the error-theorist might favour *replacement*, the substitution of the language of self with talk only of streams or of entities that are by hypothesis reducible to streams. Suppose we define the 'language of stream-selves' to

Philosophy and Personal Identity: Empty Persons (London: Ashgate, 2003), chapter 6, where he refers to the Mādhyamika as a Buddhist (Semantic) Anti-Realist. Roy Perrett interprets the Mādhyamika as a minimalist in his 'Personal identity, minimalism and madhyamaka', *Philosophy East & West* 52/3 (2002):. 373–85. I would prefer, if a label is required, to call these philosophers Buddhist Performativists.

[8] David Velleman, 'Self to self', *The Philosophical Review* 105 (1996): 39–76; reprinted in *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. p. 193, n. 42 and p. 210, n. 53.

[9] Daniel Dennett offers exactly such an account, in his 'The self as a centre of narrative gravity', in Frank S. Hessel, Pamela M. Cole and Dale L. Johnson (eds), *Self and Consciousness: Multiple Perspectives* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum Associates, 1992), pp. 103–15. As David Velleman summarizes it in *Self to Self* (p. 204), Dennett's view is that 'the self is the non-existent author of a merely fictional autobiography composed by the human organism, which neither is nor embodies a real self'. The human organism makes it appear as if there is a self that is telling the story of itself in an act of self-constitution.

be the richest language that is, by hypothesis, reducible to the language of streams. Then Parfit's most recent position, if I have understood it rightly, is a combination of an error-theory about the language of subjects with a recommendation that we substitute this language for the language of stream-subjects.[10] Among the Indians, Advaita Vedānta most closely approximates the error-theoretic paradigm of irrealism, but it denies that there is any substitute for the language we have (the truth is *anirvacanīya*, 'not able to be spoken of').

The non-factualist owes us an explanation of another kind. If the function of our self-talk is, in spite of appearances, not to talk of any such objects as selves, then what *does* it do? The non-factualist will need to explain the extent to which the intuitive commitment to representationalism can be given up, but will distinguish that question from a further one about the extent to which the language of self, irrealistically construed, can and should be surrendered. It seems to me that the Upaniṣadic account of the self, as described in chapter 1 of this book, fits the paradigm of non-fact-assertive irrealism—to use 'I'-talk is not to speak of an object among others in the world; it has another function altogether, a function that is, nevertheless, importantly non-redundant.[11]

7.2 Āryadeva's argument against souls

Āryadeva, the student of Nāgārjuna and roughly a contemporary of Sextus Empiricus, rehearses a curious argument in support of the Buddhist thesis that there are no selves qua souls:

[10] Derek Parfit, 'Experiences, subjects and conceptual schemes', *Philosophical Topics* 26 (1999): 217–70. See also the discussion in the previous chapter.

[11] This three-fold scheme of classification supplements one I gave in my *Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 98. There I distinguished four metaphysical positions: irrealism, reductionism, metaphysical pluralism and additive (non-pluralist) realism, and I identified the Madhyamaka Buddhism of Nāgārjuna as irrealist, the Yogācāra/Vijñānavāda Buddhism of Dignāga as reductionist, the Jainas as metaphysical pluralists, and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas as additive realists. I distinguished between error-theoretic and non-factualist irrealism, but did not specify further. I am now claiming that Madhyamaka Buddhism (at least, that of Candrakīrti) is non-factualist, and that Advaita Vedānta is error-theoretic, although the Upaniṣads nevertheless sustain a non-factualist reading. Finally, I have said that Abhidharma Buddhism (at least, that of Vasubandhu) is reductionist about persons. I have still not said all that needs to be said with respect to further subdivisions within Buddhism and Vedānta.

That which is self to you is not self to me; from this fixed rule it follows that that is not self. Indeed, the construction (*kalpanā*) [of a sense of self] arises out of the impermanent things.[12]

T. R. V. Murti ventures the following paraphrase of this difficult verse: 'If the *ātman* [self] were a real entity, there should be agreement about it. On the contrary one's *ātman* (self) is *anātman* (non-self) for another, and vice versa; and this should not be the case if it were an objective reality.'[13] Murti's paraphrase hints at an interesting reading of the argument in the verse (I will examine the readings of the traditional commentators later). Why do human beings have a concept of self? What work does it do? Possession of a concept of self is important because it enables me to think of my ideas and emotions, my plans and aspirations, my hopes and fears, as *mine*—as *belonging* to me, and the proper focus of *my* self-interest. Equally, it is the concept of self which is in play when I think of your ideas and emotions, your plans and aspirations, your hopes and fears, as *yours*—the proper focus of *your* self-interest. A human being without a concept of self, therefore, would be a seriously impoverished creature. Lacking the concept of self, I would not be able to draw the distinction between what is mine and what is yours, and unable to make that distinction, I should also lack the capacity to form plans or act on intentions, not to mention the ability to make promises, enter into commitments or accept responsibility. For example, I would not be in a position to intend to do something, for I would not understand that the intention is fulfilled only if I and nobody else performs the action intended. It is our capacity to make that distinction to which Āryadeva draws our attention when he says that 'that which is self to you is not self to me'. What we have, then, is an adequacy condition on potential theories of self.

Āryadeva next argues that the classical (i.e. non-reductive realist) theory of self *fails* the adequacy condition. That theory asserts that selves exist as

[12] CŚ 10.3: *yas tavātmā mamānātmā tenātmāniyamān na saḥ | nanv anityeṣu bhāveṣu kalpanā nāma jāyate ||* Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya (ed.), *The Catuḥśataka of Āryadeva, Sanskrit and Tibetan Texts with Copious Extracts from the Commentary of Candrakīrti* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1974), p. 71. Cf. Karen Lang, *Āryadeva's Catuḥśataka: On the Bodhisattva's Cultivation of Merit and Knowledge* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1986). A difficulty relates to the phrase *ātmā niyamāt*. I have followed Candrakīrti in reading *niyamāt* 'from a fixed rule'; the Tibetan, however, reads *ma ṅes phyir* [= *niyamāt*] 'from the absence of a fixed rule'.

[13] T. R. V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System* (London: Unwin, 1960), p. 204.

real and permanent entities; it reifies the facts of selfhood, and accounts for our possession of a concept of self on the model of our possession of concepts of external objects. Āryadeva's refutation of that theory involves the claim that the model on which it is based is false. For our concept of an object is a concept of something public, an inhabitant of a shared world, something that can equally well and simultaneously be the common focus of *your* and *my* attention. To reify the self, to explain our possession of a concept of self on the model of our possession of the concept of an object, is thus precisely to render one incapable of explaining why we have the concept of self in the first place—that it sustains the notion of something being exclusively or distinctively *mine*.[14] The target of this argument is any substance theory of self.

Candrakīrti's commentary on the first half of the verse strengthens and contextualizes the argument:

It follows that the self does not exist essentially (*svarūpataḥ*). If the self were to exist essentially, then just as it would be the foundation of one person's sense of 'I', so it would be the foundation of everyone's sense of 'I'. For it is not the case that the essential nature of fire is burning and yet that sometimes it does not burn. So if the self were to exist essentially, it would be the self for everyone and the focal point of their sense of 'I'. And this is not the case, for

That which is self to you is not self to me; from this fixed rule it follows that that is not self.

That which is self to you, the focal point of your sense of 'I' (*ahaṃkāra*) and self-interest (*ātmasneha*), that indeed is not self to me; for it is not the focal point of my sense of 'I' and self-interest. This then is the fixed rule from which it follows that it is not [a real thing]. There is no essence to such a self as is not invariably present. One should give up the superimposition of [such] a self, for it is something the content of which is unreal (*asadartha*).[15]

If what Parfit called the Cartesian View were correct, that is, the view that we are immaterial souls, then the facts of subjectivity could not be explained. This seems to be an inversion of the third type of anti-reductionist argument mentioned above: there are features of the language

[14] Compare J. P. Sartre: 'I am incapable of apprehending for myself the self which I am for the Other, just as I am incapable of apprehending the basis of the Other-as-object which appears to me, what the Other is for himself', *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 266.

[15] V. Bhattacharya (ed.), *Catuḥśataka*, p. 71.

of self that the traditional construal of that language cannot find room for. We will see below that Candrakīrti supplements this argument with another one from Nāgārjuna.

In defence of the classical view, Abhinavagupta (fl. 1014 CE) argues that it can explain the ability to distinguish between self and others as long as it permits that thinking is reflexively self-aware.[16] In the *Santānāntaradūṣaṇa*, however, the Buddhist Ratnakīrti argues that reflexivity is insufficient to do this (see §7.7). He will claim that the distinction between self and other cannot be made at all.

7.3 Does it matter that this pain is my pain?

Āryadeva has presented us, in effect, with an adequacy condition on any putative theory of self—that it must be able to explain the possibility and significance of the contrast between mine and yours—and he has argued further that the theory of self which claims that selves are real ontologically irreducible mental entities, is unable to explain even how that contrast is possible. What then of the Buddhist theory? How well does it fare? As articulated by Candrakīrti in his comment on the second half of the verse we are discussing, the Buddhist theory is that a concept of self is a cognitive construction out of the aggregate stream of psycho-physical events:

If there is no self, whence this sense of 'I' and self-interest? Our author says:

Indeed, the construction [of a sense of self] arises out of the impermanent things.

Although, from the rule mentioned above, it follows that an actual self as essential and distinct from the psycho-physical constituents never exists, still a constructed idea of self [arises] out of the impermanent things that do exist—physical attributes, cognitions, sensations, volitions and conceptions. A construction (*kalpanā*) is made whose content is unreal, that the self exists and lives and moves about. A self is to be conceptualized as dependent on the psycho-physical constituents, just as fire is dependent on kindling. The meaning of the statement that there is a construction of self out of the impermanent elements is that it is constructed by a conceptualization dependent on the notion that it does not exist essentially, but as

[16] Abhinavagupta, *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivimarśinī*, ed. M. K. Sastri (Bombay: Kashmir Sanskrit Texts Series 90, 1938), vol. I, p. 102.

different in nature from the constituents and yet determined in [accordance with] the fivefold way of analysis.[17]

We have seen that the metaphor of fire and fuel is used by all Buddhists to explicate the relationship of 'dependence' that exists between the self or person and the stream. Nāgārjuna (MK 10.14) says that one might understand the relationship in one of five ways: (i) the fire is one with the fuel; (ii) the fire is different from the fuel; (iii) the fire possesses the fuel; (iv) the fire is the locus of the fuel; and (v) the fire is located in the fuel. He then claims that none of these five ways is consistent with the supposition that fire is a separate entity distinct from the fuel. Applied to the self, the metaphor and the method lead us to see that whatever the dependence is of the self on the stream, it cannot be explained in accordance with the traditional model of self.

In the last chapter, we saw the Pudgalavādins using a very similar method against the idea that the person is simply reducible to the stream, and indeed, there is a suspicion that the Reductionist account fares no better than the traditional account in explaining the idea of ownership. Richard Sorabji has recently pressed that objection against both Parfitian and Buddhist versions of Reductionism.[18] The worry is that while the Reductionist theory of Buddhists like Vasubandhu can make sense of the *possibility* of the distinction between mine and yours, it is incapable of sustaining a plausible explanation of the *point* and *significance* of that distinction. The substitution of our ordinary talk about myself and other persons with talk about this or that stream of psycho-physical events deprives our use of such notions as responsibility, commitment, credit, blame, pity and compassion, and even intention, shared attention and social referencing, of much of their point. Suppose, for example, that I intend to shout at someone in order to draw their attention to me. Substituting the vocabulary of 'I' and 'they' for talk of this and that stream, we shall have to redescribe the situation as one in which one stream contains a desire that another stream 'should' contain an attention produced by the shouting. Here, Sorabji says:

[17] *Catuḥśataka*, pp. 71–2.

[18] Richard Sorabji, 'The self in four Indian schools of philosophy'. Lecture delivered at Gresham College, London, on 27 November 2002[b]. See also his *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life, and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), chapters 15, 16.

the word 'should' means that it would be desirable, but we are not supposed to talk of anybody for whom it would be desirable, only of the desirability of one stream containing a shouting and the other a resultant attention, presumably because the total situation with its various streams would be more desirable from a rather abstract point of view. But intention, conceived this way, seems to have lost much of its point and motivation precisely because there is no one *for whom* the outcome would be desirable.

The point is that it no longer seems to matter much whether a particular good experience is included in this stream rather than that:

It is better that the universe should contain good experiences rather than bad, but as to which stream of consciousness they might enter, why should that matter? Perhaps because it is preferable that experiences should occur in some sequences rather than others, since their significance will be altered by the sequence. But this would only motivate a preference for certain *types* of sequence over others. Detachment would have been achieved, but at rather a high price.

This argument is related to what Parfit has called the Extreme Claim, the claim that 'if the Reductionist View is true, we have *no* reason to be concerned about our own futures'.[19] Ordinarily we think that while knowing that somebody will suffer a pain gives me at least some reason to prevent it, knowing that it is I who will suffer the pain provides an 'additional reason' to act. According to the Extreme Claim, however, a Reductionist must deny that there are any such 'additional reasons'. Thus Parfit: 'That some pain will be *mine* does not, in itself, give me any *more* reason to prevent the pain.'[20] If this seems implausible, then perhaps, instead, the fact that the pain will belong to the *same* psycho-physical stream as the expectation itself provides a reason for special concern: this is what Parfit calls the Moderate Claim. Parfit acknowledges the idea that there is a distinction between the concern one has for the pain of another and the 'anticipation' one feels with respect to *one's own* future pain, and that it is hard to see how a Reductionist can give weight and importance to that distinction, but declares himself unable to find a conclusive argument for or against either the Extreme or the Moderate Claim. Perhaps we should just give up anticipating our future pains.

The approach of Āryadeva and Candrakīrti seems able to avoid this objection. They do not reduce the relation of dependence between the

[19] Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 307. [20] Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 308.

self and the stream to one either of identity or constitution. Candrakīrti, following Nāgārjuna, explains the relation of dependence as akin to the dependence of fire on kindling. The position is that as long as we are careful to separate the notion of self from any false imputation of ontological commitment to a real mental substance, the residue is a concept of self that can be sustained by talk of this and that psycho-physical stream, and in turn sustains the vital contrast between 'mine' and 'yours'. In saying this, one is moving from a discussion of the metaphysics of persons, and their putative reduction to streams, to a discussion of one's sense of self as a construct out of the elements of the stream. We need the language of self to make sense of the importance of the distinction between mine and yours, and we need these to be facts distinct from but not independent of facts about the streams.[21] How is this to be achieved? As we will see in detail below (§7.5), Candrakīrti's solution is to take up and reinterpret the older idea that the relationship is one of 'appropriator' (*upādātṛ*) and the 'appropriated' (*upādāna*).

7.4 Candrakīrti against the realists

Before I discuss his own theory, let me review the remaining arguments against the two realist theories: the theory that we are just souls, and the theory that we are simply streams. Candrakīrti is an irrealist. He denies that we are identical to psycho-physical streams, and he also denies that we are distinct; that is, he rejects both reductionism and substance dualism. He argues that there is a point and a function to the 'language of self', although this is not to refer to and make claims about selves; that is, he rejects representationalism. He discusses the 'dependence' of the notion of self on the psycho-physical streams, and he speculates on the possibility for, and consequences of, the giving up of our pre-theoretic commitment to representationalism in the domain of discourse.

[21] Compare here F. H. Bradley's statement that the self 'involves and only exists through an intellectual construction. The self is thus a construction based on, and itself transcending, immediate experience.' F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), p. 465. How close this brings Bradley to Madhyamaka will depend on what is imputed by the word 'transcending'. He does, however, go on to say: 'My self is not the immediate, nor again is it the ultimate, reality. Immediate reality is an experience either containing both self and not-self, or containing as yet neither. And ultimate reality, on the other hand, would be the total universe' (p. 466).

The principal textual sources for his arguments are 6.120–165 of the *Introduction to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*),[22] where he presents the method of five ways described above (in fact, elaborated to seven), and the *Prasannapadā* on 18.1–4 of Nāgārjuna's famous *Lead Verses on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*).[23]

Applying the five-fold method to the relationship between self and stream, Candrakīrti will argue that there is no representationalist construal of the language of self::

Thus the basis for our clinging to an 'I' is not a [substantial] thing. And although not other than the aggregates, the self is not the aggregates themselves. It does not own the aggregates; the aggregates are not contained by it. Yet in dependence on the aggregates does the self arise.

(MA 6.150; trans. Blankleder and Fletcher)

Nāgārjuna had already said that 'if [the self] were something other [than the psycho-physical stream], it would not be characterizable in their terms' (MK 18.1cd). That is to say, we would not be able to say things like 'I am hot', 'I am walking', 'I am happy'. Candrakīrti explains:

If the self were other than the psycho-physical elements, its definition would not mention them. The five psycho-physical elements are defined as bodily form, experiencing, seizing on the specific character of things, shaping one's dispositions, becoming aware of objects. The self, conceived of as wholly other than the psycho-physical elements, just as consciousness is other than physical form, would require a separate definition.

(PP, B 343–344)

If the self is an entity ontologically distinct from the constituents of the psycho-physical stream, then it will have to be described in terms exclusively appropriate to it, just as the Cartesian dualist describes mind in one set of terms ('thinking') and matter in another ('spatial extension').

[22] *Madhyamakāvatāra*, verses and auto-commentary; presently available only in Tibetan translation: Louis de la Vallée Poussin (ed.), *Madhyamakāvatāra par Candrakīrti* (St Petersburg: Imperial Academy of Sciences, 1907–12). Translations of 6.120–165 are available in: Louis de la Vallée Poussin, in *Muséon* 12 (1912), pp. 235–328 (French); C. W. Huntington Jr. and Geshé Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Geshé Rabten, *Echoes of Voidness,* ed. and trans. Stephen Batchelor (London: Wisdom Publication, 1983), pp. 74–82; Helena Blankleder and Wulstan Fletcher, Padmakara Translation Group, *Introduction to the Middle Way: Candrakīrti's Madhyamakāvatāra* (Boston and London: Shambala, 2002).

[23] Candrakīrti, *Prasannapadā* B340–350; in *Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the Commentary Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti*, ed. P. L. Vaidya (Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1987), 2nd edn.

Candrakīrti regards the idea that selves are souls as a sort of metaphysical straw man. Rejecting it doesn't really touch the main issue at all, which is to get at a proper explanation of our sense of ownership of our experiences, emotions and bodies. So:

Some think that when 'no self' is understood, this means the refutation of a permanent, existent self. But of our clinging to 'I' this could never be the ground. How strange to say that understanding this suffices to uproot belief in 'I'. For this is like a man who finds a snake's nest in his wall and overcomes his fright by saying, 'It is not an elephant.' A method such as this to cure one's dread of snakes—Alas, it's one sure way to be a laughingstock.

(MA 6.140–1; trans. Blankleder and Fletcher)

The real moral danger to which the idea of 'no self' is responsive is not assuaged by defeating a straw metaphysical man. The errors we make in our thought about self go much deeper than that. Indeed, the idea that 'I' refers to a soul is not even part of our folk concept. It is just a piece of false theory:

But since it is unborn, just like the barren woman's child, this [substantial] self is utterly unreal. It cannot be regarded as the basis for clinging to 'I', for even in the 'concealing level' (*saṃvṛti-satya*) it cannot claim existence (6.122) . . . . The common man does not ascribe his sense of 'I' to such a source. He does not know of such a self, and yet he thinks: 'I am.' And we may see that beings born as beasts for many ages never apprehend a self unborn and permanent. And yet they clearly have a sense of 'I.' Thus, [ontologically] separate from the aggregates, there is no self.

(6.124cd–125).

This passage, in a manner reminiscent of Hume, invites us to seek the origins of our sense of self, given that it does not consist in the inner perception of a soul. The idea of a soul is an idle wheel in the explanation of self; accepting or rejecting it does no work in accounting for the facts of selfhood.[24]

What about the alternative, that the self consists in the stream? Nāgārjuna, once more, has provided the lead, saying that 'if the self were identical

[24] Another important Buddhist argument against souls, as found for example in Dignāga *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.6.11, is that the identity over time of a soul is incompatible with its modification as knowledge is lost or gained. That argument was, however, effectively rebutted by Kumārila: *Ślokavārttika, Pratyakṣaparicched*a 4.53ab; *Ātmavāda* 5.18.21–9. See also John Taber, *A Hindu Critique of Buddhist Epistemology: Kumārila on Perception* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), pp. 64–6.

with the stream, a part would be rising and [a part] falling' (MK 18.1 ab; cf. 27.6). 'Rising' and 'falling' here refer to a coming into and going out of existence: if the psycho-physical stream were a self, then that self would be in a continual state of creation and decay. The argument against this is that there would then be too many selves. It is most clearly stated by Candrakīrti in the *Introduction*:

But if the self were identical with the elements, then, since they are many (*bahu*), there would be many more selves too.

(MA 6. 127ab; quoted at PP B 342)

That is to say, the self would be transient: there would be a continuum of distinct selves in a single stream.[25] The Nyāya philosopher Vyomaśiva (*c.*950 CE) rehearses a similar argument:

The Buddhists think that the many cognitions (*vijñāna*) that exist in a single body constitute [each of them] a 'self'. In order to deny such an assertion, [it is said that] for each body there is one [self] not many.[26]

There are echoes here of Kant's argument (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A364 note a.) that the transmission of consciousness along a series of substances, as if motion between elastic balls, is insufficient to preserve unity of self. While some might willingly embrace a 'transience' view of self,[27] what is important for us to note is that Candrakīrti, a Buddhist, rejects it.

[25] Compare here the joke of Epicharmus, a fifth-century BCE Greek playwright, quoted by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 3.11: 'Well, consider men in this way too—for one is growing, one declining, and all are changing all the time. And what changes by nature, and never remains in the same state, will be something different from what changed; and by the same argument you and I are different yesterday, and different now, and will be different again—and we are never the same.' I owe this information to Richard Sorabji.

[26] *Vyomavatī of Vyomaśivācārya*, ed. Gaurinath Sastri (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1983), vol. I, p. 155, l. 9–11. The reference is to the problematic *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 3.2.15: 'Self is one because there is no distinction in the production of pleasure, pain and cognition.' See §7.7 below for further discussion.

[27] Galen Strawson defends what he used to call the 'Pearl' view and now calls the 'Transience' view, the view that 'many mental selves exist, one at a time and one after another, like pearls on a string, in the case of something like a human being.' The core conditions for something to be a self, he says, are that it is distinct from all other things and that it is a subject of experience; and these conditions do not imply persistence. Like Vyomaśiva, he thinks that this is also a Buddhist view, for he remarks in the same context that 'I believe the Buddhists have the truth when they deny the existence of a *persisting* mental self.' Galen Strawson, 'The self', in Shaun Gallagher and Jonathan Shear (eds), *Models of the Self* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 1999), pp. 1–24; and 'The self', in A. Beckermann and B. McLaughlin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007). My own view is that the Buddhists regard the idea of self as implying an interest in one's own future survival, and for that very reason resist it.

None of this prevents us from using the term 'person' (*pudgala*), if we so choose, as shorthand for 'aggregate of psychological and physical occurrences' (*nāmarūpasāmagrī*), or 'stream of psycho-physical elements' (*skandha-santāna*). The point of Candrakīrti's argument is that the sense of who I am that enables me to think of some pains or pleasures as mine and not another's does not consist in my thinking of myself as a stream, or indeed in my thinking of myself as a soul. Neither of those conceptions meets Āryadeva's adequacy condition. If a stream *is* what a person is, then the concept of a person is not that of a self. But if thinking of myself is not thinking of a soul, and if it equally does not consist in thinking of a person, then in just what *does* it consist?

7.5 Claiming experiences as one's own

Candrakīrti's idea is that the relationship between the concepts of self and stream is one of 'appropriating' (*upādāna*). This was, to recall, the very word for fuel, and also carries the sense of 'grasping, clinging, addiction'.[28] In Candrakīrti, there is an emphasis on the activity of 'taking to oneself' or 'appropriating' to oneself. Related expressions are *upādāna-skandha*, denoting the elements of the stream thought of as the material fuel that sustains the activity of appropriation; *upādāya prajñapti*, the conceptualizing construction that is an appropriating of this fuel; and *upādātṛ*, the appropriator. When this last term is used by Nāgārjuna, he says that it makes no sense to think that one part of the appropriator is destroyed but not another part (MK 27.26). Candrakīrti explains that the appropriator is indeed what is called the self, and since it can't be discovered as any of the five types of element, how can one part of it be destroyed but not another? Again, if one part could be destroyed and not another, then one part must be mortal and another part divine. It does not make sense to say that the appropriator either does or does not have parts or limits (PP B 590, l. 20–24).[29]

[28] Franklin Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit*: Vol. II, Dictionary (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), sv. *upādāna*; cf. *upādāya*. The terms have a long history. Vasubandhu too says that the person is an *upādātṛ*, but what he means is something quite different. Duerlinger says that for Vasubandhu, the sense is one of acquisition, a person acquiring new aggregates as a table might a new leg. James Duerlinger, *Indian Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's 'Refutation of the Theory of Self'* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 32.

[29] On this passage, compare David Seyfort Ruegg: 'It is explained that the relation between fire and fuel is one of appropriator (*upādātṛ*) and appropriated (*upādāna*), which is thus analogous to that

Nāgārjuna had also said, 'Everything expounded in terms of fire and fuel is, without exception, applicable to self and the psychophysical elements' (MK 10.15). Candrakīrti comments:

> That which is appropriated is the fuel, the five [types of] appropriated element. That which is constructed in the appropriating of them is said to be the appropriator, the thinker, the performing (*niṣpādaka*) self. In this is generated [the activity of] 'I'-ing, because from the beginning it has in its scope a sense of self.
>
> (PP B 212, l. 25–26)[30]

This, clearly, is what Candrakīrti considers the everyday conception of self to consist in: an appropriative act of laying claim to the elements of the psycho-physical aggregate, an act that does not require there to be any 'entity' or 'object' that is the self, nor any of the usual apparatus of reference to things:

> And thus the self—dependent on the aggregates, the elements, and the senses as they are in daily life—is thought of as the appropriator of the same; these are the objects appropriated, the self their appropriator. The self is not a real, existent thing, and thus it is not constant, for it has no birth or ending. Attributes like permanence do not apply to it, and it is not, nor is it other than, the aggregates.
>
> (MA 6. 162–3; trans. Blankleder and Fletcher)

In the *Ratnāvalī*, Nāgārjuna plays on another metaphor to describe the relation of dependence between self and stream:

> Just as it is said that an image of one's face is seen depending on a mirror but does not really exist, so the conception of 'I' exists dependent on the aggregates, but like the image of one's face the 'I' does not at all really exist.
>
> (R 1.31–2; trans. Hopkins)

A reflection depends for its existence on the mirror, but the relation of ontological dependence between the two is not like that between an object and its material. It seems to be *in* the mirror but not made *of* the mirror;

between a self (*ātman*) as appropriator and the five psycho-physical groups that are appropriated (*upādāna-skandha*).' David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981), p. 40.

[30] I have read *ādita* for *āhita*, as in some mss. The meaning of the causative noun *niṣpādaka* includes 'accomplishing, bringing about, performing, making'. On Candrakīrti's *ahaṃmāna* 'I-ing', compare Irene Fast's dynamic theory of 'selving': *Selving: A Relational Theory of Self Organization* (Hillsdale: Analytic Press, 1998).

just as fire seems to be in the fuel but not made of the fuel. Not a merely subjective illusion, it is nevertheless observer-dependent.

Consider now the use of the language of self—use of words like 'I', 'mine', 'you' and so forth. Candrakīrti provides a use-explanatory account of this talk. The utterance of 'I' serves an appropriative function, to claim possession of, to take something as one's own. The appropriation in question is to be thought of as an *activity* of laying claim to, not the making of an *assertion* of ownership. Grammatical form notwithstanding, the avowal or self-ascription of a mental state, 'I have a pain', is not a two-place relation between me and my pain; nor is it like a club's having members, or a tree's having roots (on these two senses of 'to have', see chapter 6). When I say 'I am in pain,' I do not *assert* ownership of a particular painful experience; rather, I *lay claim to* the experience within a stream. This is a performativist account of the language of self, in which 'I' statements are performative utterances, and not assertions, and the function of the term 'I' is *not* to refer. This account has the virtue of elucidating the relation between 'I' and the psycho-physical stream, and it clarifies the sense in which the facts of ownership are the 'further facts' left out of account by a reductionist theory of self.

The Mādhyamika idea, that the utility of 'I' consists in its being the means by which appropriation occurs, the taking of something as a distinctive object of self-interest, seems concordant with one recent current of thought about the self. Elizabeth Anscombe may have a sort of appropriative explanation in mind when she says that the proposition 'I am this thing here' is not an identity but a 'subjectless' construction meaning 'this thing here is the thing of whose action this idea of action is an idea, of whose movements these ideas of movement are ideas, of whose posture this idea of posture is the idea'.[31] Simon Blackburn, developing the version of expressivism called 'quasi-realism', has said, '[w]hen I think, I as it were take charge of the bundle, and it is only from the outside perspective that this is to be thought of as the passive arrival of more states for it'.[32] John Locke, on some readings, might be seen as anticipating

[31] Elizabeth Anscombe, 'The first person', in Samuel Guttenplan (ed.), *Mind and Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 45–65; reprinted in her *Collected Philosophical Papers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. 2.

[32] Simon Blackburn, 'Has Kant refuted Parfit?', in Jonathan Dancy (ed.), *Reading Parfit* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 180–201, at p. 192. On quasi-realism: his *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (Oxford:

the idea when he says that 'that with which the consciousness of this present thinking thing can join itself makes the same person, and is one self with it, and with nothing else; and so attributes to itself and owns all the actions of that thing as its own' (2.27.17).[33] William James likewise speaks of 'acts of appropriation' performed by the later elements in the stream on the earlier ones: 'Each later Thought, knowing and including thus the Thoughts which went before, is the final receptacle—and appropriating them is the final owner—of all that they contain and own.'[34] He comes closest to the idea behind Performativism when he says, in a footnote, that the words 'I' and 'me' are 'only names of *emphasis*' (p. 341, note). To say 'I am happy' is to perform an emphatic speech-act, in which a feeling of being happy is laid claim to as belonging *here* rather than *there*. I find these echoes of the idea in other writers encouraging, for they suggest that Candrakīrti's Performativist View of self is one that accords with many others' intuitions too.[35] If the person is the bundle of psycho-physical sticks, then self-appropriative activity is the string that lashes the bundle together, and to discharge this function of lashing together, it cannot be just one more stick in the bundle. It is a coagulating activity which, like fire in fuel, exists *in* the bundled items but is not made *of* them. Someone who comes to understand through training and practice that this is how the idea of self gets its purchase might well be able to lessen their attachments to particular emotions, angers and anguishes, by learning how not to appropriate them as their own.

Oxford University Press, 1993); Crispin Wright, 'Realism, antirealism, irrealism, quasirealism', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12 (1988): 24–49.

[33] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). On the interpretation of Locke as a self-constitution theorist, see Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 105–7.

[34] William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (London: Macmillan, 1910), vol. I, p. 339. Galen Strawson reads James as supportive of his own 'Transience' view; see his 'The self', in A. Beckermann and B. McLaughlin (eds), *The Oxford Handbook in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), §10.

[35] The existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard seems to be another. He speaks of 'an objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, [which] is the highest truth there is for an *existing* person', a truth that is 'the self-activity of appropriation'. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), vol. I, pp. 202, 242.

7.6 Can we shed the constructed sense of self?

We now have an account that explains the idea of self without falling prey to the Cartesian View, the view that we are immaterial souls, and which might therefore reasonably be described as a 'no-self' account. Learning to think of oneself as a whirlpool of self-appropriating action is a considerable achievement, and, we have suggested, a transformative one. Philosophy is already a therapy of self if it helps one get that far. What, though, about the other half of the philosophical programme that goes under the banner 'No self!'—the part that claims that some concepts distort a person's inner life, and are best done without altogether? If the possession of the concept of self consists in self-appropriative activity, then giving up the one means giving up the other. Nāgārjuna:

> When 'I' and 'mine' are destroyed both within and without, appropriation comes to an end; with its demise, rebirth ends.
>
> (MK 18.4)

Candrakīrti too thinks that it is possible to abandon all activity of self-appropriation of the psycho-physical, and that this is the end of the individual self (PP B 350). The completion of this is the culmination of a process of complete self-transformation, *bodhi*, 'awakening'.

Entirely giving up such appropriative action would dramatically alter the arrangement of one's inner world. It is interesting, here, to make the comparison with the absolute surrender of self expected of a revolutionary:

> The revolutionary is a lost man; he has no interests of his own, no cause of his own, no feelings, no habits, no belongings; he does not even have a name. Everything in him is absorbed by a single, exclusive interest, a single thought, a single passion—the revolution. In the very depths of his being, not just in words but in deed, he has broken every tie with the civil order, with the educated world and all laws, conventions and generally accepted conditions, and with the ethics of the world. He will be an implacable enemy of this world, and if he continues to live in it, that will only be so as to destroy it the more effectively . . . . For him, everything that allows the triumph of the revolution is moral, and everything that stands in its way is immoral.[36]

[36] From the *Revolutionary Catechism* written by Nechaev and Bakunin in 1869. See Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), pp. 365–6.

The enlightened mind is a revolutionary mind, and the Buddha might indeed have had us all become revolutionaries in thought, enemies of the conventional world of pain and suffering. But whatever our prospects of such 'awakening' may be, my focus here has been on demonstrating that there is in Mādhyamika Buddhism a powerful and plausible analysis of self as a performance, an analysis of how philosophy can lead individuals to grasp it, and a suggestion of the ethical implications of doing so.

Italo Calvino said that 'I' is a *stark* pronoun, meaning that it reveals nothing about the identity of the one who uses it. Some later philosophers worry that, since each person, indeed each thought, thinks of itself as 'I', self-reference does not facilitate the individuation of selves. I will look briefly at a fragment of this later discussion, before concluding the book with a Buddhist story that illustrates the relationship between the acquisition of philosophical knowledge about the nature of self, on the one hand, and moral progress, on the other.

7.7 Minds and the boundaries between them

Allowing the existence of streams other than one's own is a problem for those philosophers who followed Dignāga (*c.*480–540 CE), founder of the idealist Vijñānavāda 'Mind-only' school of Buddhism, and a teacher at the famous Buddhist university of Nālanda. His interpreter Dharmakīrti (*c.*600–660 CE) argues that an inference from analogy can establish the existence of other streams, even if one is an idealist,[37] but Ratnakīrti (*c.*1070 CE), a member of the Citrādvaitavāda 'Nondual-consciousness' sub-school,[38] questions the validity of the inference, and raises a more specific problem. There is no way, he argues, to draw a boundary (*avadhi*) between distinct psycho-physical streams, and no prospect of individuating minds:

[37] Dharmakīrti, *Santānāntara-siddhi*. Preserved only in Tibetan. Trans. Hidenori Kitagawa, 'A refutation of solipsism', *Journal of the Greater India Society* 14–15 (1955): 55–73, 97–110. See Kumārila, *Ślokavārttika*, *Ātmavāda* 5.18.145 for a realist's formulation of the inference.

[38] Their source-text is Dharmakīrti, *Pramāṇavārttika* 3.389, 221–2. Kajiyama summarizes the idea as follows: '[C]ognition, though it contains in itself various forms, is after all the uniform cognition, because we cannot divide our cognition into two parts. Thus, speaking in the sense of the highest truth, there is no difference in time or space in our cognition.' Yuichi Kajiyama, 'Buddhist solipsism: A free translation of Ratnakīrti's *Santānāntaradūṣaṇa*', *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 13 (1965): 435–20.

> Some people, thinking that there is no proof for other streams of experience, and no refutation either, say, 'Just allow there to be doubt on this point.' Such people should attend to the refutation that is about to be stated.
>
> Were there another stream, then one's own stream would necessarily be different from it. Otherwise, what is considered as another stream would not be different from one's own stream … And that difference, as an essential property of a stream of experience, would certainly be apparent within one's own stream … But this difference is not [in fact] apparent.
>
> If a representation of the difference were cognised, there would undeniably be a representation of the other stream as forming a boundary to one's own. Remember everything said about this by Jñānaśrīmitra: 'If the proper form of one's own mind were different from another, there would be a representation of a boundary as well. Otherwise it would not be cognisable as such.' And: 'Not even a trace of difference appears: from what could it be different?'[39]

The argument is that individual thoughts do not identify themselves specifically as 'belonging to me' or 'belonging to you'—nothing in the content or internal form of a reflexive 'I'-thought tags it to one mind rather than another. Ratnakīrti, it seems, places a more stringent demand on the concept of appropriation: in order to lay claim to a thought as one's own, the thought must identify itself as belonging to oneself, and not to somebody else. An item of the mind, whether it be a belief or an emotion, is not really mine unless there is something internal to it that identifies it as *mine* and not another's, an identification that cannot consist merely in its being reflexively self-aware.[40] Why this more stringent requirement on the appropriation of elements into a stream? Perhaps because it is not enough to make my thoughts *mine* that I think of them as mine: we all do that. I must think of my thoughts as Jonardon Ganeri's, as his unique

[39] Ratnakīrti's *Santānāntaradūṣaṇa,* in Anantalal Thakur (ed.), *Ratnakīrtinibandhāvaliḥ: Buddhist Nyāya Works of Ratnakīrti*. Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series, vol. 3 (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), p. 147. The subsequent passages are on pp. 148 and 149.

[40] All Yogācāra and Mādhyamika philosophers endorse a reflexivity principle about the mental. See my 'Self-intimation, memory and personal identity', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 27 (1999a): 469–83; Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: a Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 1998); Zhihua Yao, *The Buddhist Theory of Self-Cognition* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). The principal argument is a reductio: there would otherwise be an infinite series of progressively higher-order cognitions. For a variety of attempts to refute the reflexivity principle, see the commentaries on *Yogasūtra* 4.19. The Buddhists did not agree with the realists that a self is revealed in or perceived by self-awareness. Neither did Schopenhauer, but for different reasons: 'Consciousness is the mere surface of our mind, and of this, as of the world, we do not know the interior, but only the crust.' *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. II, p. 136.

possession and branded in some way that uniquely identifies them as his.[41] And if I am to be able to think of my thoughts as so branded, then the imprimatur must be internally accessible and not merely a function of causal connectedness. Ratnakīrti's argument, if it works, is another refutation of the reductionist theory of persons, as it is to be found in, for example, Vasubandhu, quite independently of whatever consequences it may have for the existence of other minds; but it has serious implications too for the performativist approaches to the construction of selves we find in authors like Candrakīrti.[42]

In the remainder of his text, Ratnakīrti seeks to address two worries one might have with the no-boundary theory. One is that writing down the theory in a tract refuting the existence of other minds involves one in a pragmatic self-contradiction, for it presupposes an audience distinct from the author. To this, Ratnakīrti replies that the author composes the text and rehearses the argument while thinking within a conventional framework of concepts that does indeed presuppose that there are other minds, but in the process comes to a greater understanding of the true nature of things. This is a strategy we have seen before; indeed, it is extremely similar to Maṇḍanamiśra's defence of the practice of listening to the Upaniṣads (chapter 5). It reveals, yet again, how well the Indians appreciate that there are many things to do with a text, that both reading and writing a text can be an exercise for moral progress.

The other worry concerns the omniscience of the Buddha. If it is necessary to produce an *argument* in order to establish whether there are other minds or not, then it would seem that the Buddha's own words leave the matter open, and that might imply that he himself did not know (recall the discussion, in chapter 2, on the Buddha's silence). Ratnakīrti

[41] What would be needed, if self-knowledge were to be possible, is an acquaintance with one's individual essence or haecceity. This is a view that has been defended by Roderick Chisholm, *Person and Object* (La Salle: Open Court, 1976). Ratnakīrti, of course, will deny that there are individual essences, and so also deny that self-knowledge is possible. Philosophers in the Vaiśeṣika tradition agree with the principle, and instead defend the existence of *de se* haecceity, which they call *viśeṣa*. I will comment further on the Vaiśeṣika position below.

[42] In *Self to Self: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), David Vellemen argues that 'self' merely expresses a reflexive mode of presentation, that 'the word "self" does not denote any one entity but rather expresses a reflexive guise under which parts or aspects of a person are presented to his own mind' (p.1). His theory of self, which has an affinity to Abhinavagupta's argument that reflexivity is the source of the distinction between self and other (see above), would be included within the target of Ratnakīrti's objection.

maintains, however, that the Buddha knew that there were no other minds, and therefore there was nothing he did not know. Presumably, we explain the apparent acknowledgement of other minds that the use of discourses and sermons implies as another instance of the protreptic and indirect character of the Buddha's teaching—the aim is to reduce suffering wherever it might occur in the great mass of undivided cognition that is the totality of experience. If there is no manifest boundary between one mind and another, there is no division of the aggregated mass of mental 'stuff' into distinct psycho-physical streams, from either an internal or an external perspective.

Ratnakīrti worries, finally and with good reason, that this brings the Buddhist theory of the mental dangerously close to that of the Advaita Vedāntic theory of the soul (*ātmavāda*), in which there is only one soul, *brahman*, and no real difference between apparently distinct individual souls, which are fabricated delimitations of the one soul in just the same way that the walls of a house delimit space.[43] Ratnakīrti's response is as follows:

> The obscurity caused by [the similarity of our theory with] the Vedānta doctrine was removed by the commentator [Prajñākaragupta, on Dharmakīrti] who showed [the difference] by pointing out the simple fact that [our uniform cognition] contains in it a *variety* of forms as well. So, commenting on the verse 'Perception cognises its own self and not any other thing (PV 3.327),' Prajñākaragupta explained that if the opponent says that [our theory] will result in the soul-theory (*ātmavāda*) [of the Vedānta], the answer is that it will not, because consciousness is self-reflexively manifested as having various appearances or forms (*citrākāra-saṃvedanāt*).

A little earlier another follower of Dharmakīrti, Śāntarakṣita (*c*.750 CE), had said in his Buddhist critique of Advaita Vedānta that there is only one 'slight mistake' (*alpa-aparādha*) in their account, namely their insistence that consciousness is eternal and unitary rather than divided into perceptions of colour, sound, and so on.[44] There is indeed a remarkable convergence

[43] Śaṅkara, *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* 1.1.31, 1.4.22 (see below). The 'delimitation' interpretation (*avaccheda-vāda*) follows Vācaspati Miśra's *Bhāmati*; another view, the 'reflection' interpretation (*bimba-pratibimba-vāda*), claims instead that the appearance of a plurality of individual selves admits of an explanation analogous to that of the single moon's multiple reflections in a pool. See Srinivasa Chari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita: A Study Based on Vedānta Deśika's Śatadūṣaṇī* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999, revised 2nd edn), pp. 69–74.

[44] *Tattvasaṅgraha* 330. *Tattvasaṅgraha of Ācārya Śāntarakṣita with the Pañjikā of Kamalaśīla*, ed. Dwarkidas Shastri (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1968), vol. 1, p. 156. See also Hajime Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, Part 1, 1990), pp. 245–57.

between the Māhāyana Buddhists and the Advaita interpreters of the Upaniṣads, and both sides comment on it. Śrīharṣa, although an Advaita Vedāntin, defends Madhyamaka against Udayana's criticism.[45] Śaṅkaramiśra (*c.*1430 CE), who, being a Naiyāyika, was somewhat removed from all of this, would later sum up the difference thus: the Advaitins believe in the nonduality of brahman (*brahmādvaita*), the Buddhists in the nonduality of cognition (*jñānādvaita*).[46] Both seem to agree that the impossibility of drawing real boundaries implies that there is a single stuff of consciousness, which is conceived of either as a single soul (*brahman*) or else as a distributed mass of cognition-in-flux (*citta*, *vijñāna*). In the end, the irrealist philosophers all see the delimitations of self as an artifice that the therapy of philosophy aims to cure us of.

Beginning in the fourteenth century, the realist philosophers of the self in India commence a detailed and fascinating examination of the problem of one and many selves. Their 'source text' consists in two enigmatic verses from the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* of Kaṇāda (*c.*100 CE), VS 3.2.15–16, the first of which asserts that there is one self, the second that there are many:

Self is one because there is no distinction in the production of pleasure, pain and cognition.

Selves are many because there is a restriction.

As the discussion about VS 3.2.15 that would ensue reveals, the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* is another of those texts 'within which were left deliberate, open spaces for interpretation'. This is in fact, I would claim, a general feature of the 'sūtra' genre. I have already referred to Vyomaśiva's reinterpretation of this sūtra as a refutation of the Transience View of self. Some commentators argue that it refers to God, or *brahman*, the divine soul. Others, however, maintain that it is a statement of an opponent's position, and if this is right then the 'open space' it leaves can also be filled by the two later monistic theories we have just been discussing. In this way, VS 3.2.15 provides subsequent

[45] *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, pp. 3–45. See Phyllis Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrīharṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 84–110; Satkari Mookerjee, 'The absolutist's standpoint in logic', *Nava-Nalanda-Mahavihara Research Publication* 1 (1957): 1–175; esp. pp. 138–47; B. K. Matilal, *Epistemology, Logic and Grammar in Indian Philosophical Analysis* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 155.

[46] Śaṅkaramiśra, *Vādavinoda*, ed. Ganganatha Jha (Allahabad: Panini Office, 1915), p. 54.

commentators with the opportunity to respond to *later* objections to the Vaiśeṣika theory.[47]

The argument for plurality in VS 3.2.16 is that mental states are restricted in their occurrence: I do not feel your pain or think your thoughts; I can be happy but you unhappy; I awake, you asleep. What VS 3.2.16 provides is textual space within which to discuss the possible sources of that restriction. One standard view seems to have been that embodiment is a precondition for having experiences at all, but that location in a body alone is not sufficient to restrict experiences to individual selves. For it is at least possible that I should occupy another person's body, but not similarly possible that I should possess or own their thoughts (see the next section for a story illustrating this point). On this view, the impossibility in play when we say that it is impossible that I should think your thoughts or feel your pains is akin to the impossibility of a thing being made out of something other than it is; for example, that this very pot should have been made out of some other lump of clay, let alone of some other material altogether. It is akin, that is to say, to the necessity of composition.[48]

In their acceptance of the reality of both one and many selves, and in their rejection of two ways of accounting for the multiplicity of selves—restriction to bodies, and the accidental delimitation of a single soul—the Vaiśeṣikas have a surprising amount in common with two early Neoplatonist thinkers, Plotinus (205–270 CE) and Porphyry (232–304 CE). In an argument that resembles the restriction argument of VS 3.2.16, Plotinus says, 'But if the soul is everywhere the same, how can there be a soul particular to each individual? And how can one soul be good, and another evil?' (*Enneads* 6.4). Porphyry comments:

One should not think that it is by reason of the multiplicity of bodies that the multiplicity of souls has come about, but rather that it is prior to bodies that souls are both many and one, with the single universal soul not preventing the existence of many souls within it, and the many not effecting a partition of the single soul between them. For they distinguish themselves without cutting themselves off,

[47] I discuss this point further in my 'Contextualism in the study of Indian philosophical cultures', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Theory and Method in Indian Intellectual History*, special issue of *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (forthcoming). For an examination of the commentators, especially on VS 3.1: Klaus Oetke, '*Ich' und das Ich: analytische Untersuchungen zur buddhistisch-brahmanischen Atmankontroverse* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1988), pp. 278–343.

[48] See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

nor fragmenting the universal soul into themselves, and they are present to each other without confusion, nor by making the universal a mere conglomeration; for they are not divided from one another by boundaries, nor again, are they blended with one another; even as the many items of knowledge are not blended together in a single soul, and, again, are not merely juxtaposed in the soul like bodies, maintaining a distinction of substance, but they are qualitatively distinct activities of the soul.

(*Sentences* 37, 42,13–43,9)[49]

Richard Sorabji summarizes Plotinus' rather complex overall position as follows: '[T]hat there is a plurality of souls is shown by the fact that Plotinus is keen to insist that our souls are not parts of the World Soul which makes the stars revolve, but that that is a sister soul derived, like ours, from the hypostasis soul. The human and world souls can be called "parts" of the hypostasis soul only in the special sense in which theorems, though derived from a whole system, can also be called parts of it.' The later Vaiśeṣikas wonder whether there is a universal, 'soulness' (*ātmatvajāti*), of which both each individual soul *and* the divine soul is an instance.[50] That would provide still a third model for the unity and multiplicity of souls, and it resembles Plotinus in distinguishing that in virtue of which both individual souls and the divine soul are all souls from the divine soul itself.

On the topic of one and many selves, Vaiśeṣika is closer to Neoplatonism than is Advaita Vedānta, for Advaita denies there is a real division of souls, and does take the subtle body to be a principle of artificial division. Thus Śaṅkara:

For, as the passages, 'I am Brahman,' 'That art thou,' and others, prove, there is in reality no such thing as an individual soul absolutely different from Brahman, but Brahman, in so far as it differentiates itself through the mind (*buddhi*) and other limiting conditions, is called individual soul, agent, enjoyer.

(*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* under 1.1.31; trans. Thibaut)

Again,

And as it is so, all the adherents of the Vedānta must admit that the difference of the soul and the highest Self is not real, but due to the limiting adjuncts, viz.

[49] Both translations are from Richard Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD* (London: Duckworth, 2004), vol. 3, pp. 343–5.

[50] For instance, Mahādeva Puṇtāmakara (*c.*1660 CE), *Ātmatvajātivicāra* (Auftrecht cat., Bodleian, ms. 608, foll. 126–38).

the body, and so on, which are the product of name and form as presented by Nescience.

(BSB under 1.4.22)[51]

7.8 Body-swapping and survival

I will conclude this book on a lighter note. It is a story from an early Mādhyamika text, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*.[52] It is meant to illustrate the role of a correct philosophical understanding of self for moral progress. In the story, that knowledge is acquired in a most shocking fashion, but the lesson is learnt well. The story is prefaced by a discussion rehearsing three suggestions from non-Buddhist sources as to why a notion of self as distinct from streams is required. The first is that:

Each individual person conceives the notion of the self in relation to his own person (*svakāya*), not in relation to that of someone else. If, therefore, he wrongly considers as self the non-self of his own person, he would also wrongly consider as self the non-self of another person.

Lamotte reads the argument as an insistence that my concept of myself as distinct from you is explicable only if the concept 'corresponds with something real', and regards it as presenting the position refuted by Āryadeva (see §7.2). The second argument is that:

If there is no internal self, [then, given that] acquaintance with colours arises and perishes from moment to moment, how does one distinguish and recognize the colour blue, yellow, red or white?

[51] For Rāmānuja's rejection of Śaṅkara's argument, see George Thibaut, *The Vedānta Sūtras with the Commentary of Rāmānuja*, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 48 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1904), p. 100; Srinivasa Chari, *Advaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita*, pp. 69–74.

[52] *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, translated from the Chinese by Étienne Lamotte (Louvain: Bibliothéque du Muséon, 1944), vol. 1, esp. pp. 735–50: 'Non-existence de "ātman".' In his introduction to vol. 3, Lamotte withdraws his endorsement of the traditional identification of Nāgārjuna as the author of the text, giving as his grounds a new dating of the author of the *Traité* as approximately the beginning of the fourth century CE. John Brough speculates that the erroneous attribution to Nāgārjuna may have begun with Kumārajīva: 'There is no doubt whatsoever that the Chinese translator Kumārajīva believed that the *Traité* was the genuine work of the original Nāgārjuna; and for this belief he had reasonable excuse, since the work is in the main Madhyamaka tradition, and refers to and sometimes paraphrases the *Madhyamakakārikās*. This being so, it is natural to assume that the attribution of the *Traité* to Nāgārjuna is simply a mistake due to Kumārajīva or his near-contemporaries.' John Brough, 'Review of Lamotte', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 35 (1972): 165–7. As for the story itself, it is probably considerably older than this text, its origins seeming to lie in an account of the legend of the Buddhist Emperor Aśoka.

This looks as if it is an early statement of what was to become a very influential argument in favour of the self, found in the commentaries to *Nyāya-Sūtra* 3.1.1, that the self is required by the possibility of psychological unity and the reidentification of objects (see §6.6). Then another argument familiar from the *Nyāya-Sūtra* is rehearsed, that:

> If there is no self, and since the knowledge of human activities, arising and perishing repeatedly, all disappear with the life of the body, who then is left to reap the rewards—good or bad? Who endures sadness or happiness? Who is set free?

That echoes the familiar argument of Vātsyāyana in his commentary to *Nyāyasūtra* 1.1.10, that just desert is inexplicable in the absence of personal identity. We have seen how the Buddhist might respond to such a claim earlier in this book, and we will consider the issue again in Appendices B and C.[53]

Our story dramatizes the first of these arguments. Derek Parfit famously introduced a science-fiction example to test how we feel about questions of survival.[54] He asked us to imagine that we are stepping into a teletransporter, a machine that completely destroys the body at the same time as it transmits all the physical and psychological data necessary to reconstitute the person in another transporter situated in a far remote place, and he argues that we care less about the imminent destruction of our old body than about the continuity of our psychological lives in the life of the replica. What about the slightly modified case in which, as a result of a malfunction, my old body isn't destroyed but continues to live for a short while (Parfit calls this the Branch Line case)? Do the well-being and good prospects of my replica far away (someone who has all my memories and personality traits, and calls himself by my name) provide me with comfort in the face of 'my' imminent death? Can that person be held responsible for my past misdeeds? Here our intuitions are less clear, and for Parfit that is exactly how they

[53] The argument is available in Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā and Śaiva Siddhānta sources. For the latter, see for example *Parākhyatantra* 1.29; Dominic Goodall (ed.), *The Parākhyatantra: A Scripture of the Śaiva Siddhānta* (Pondicherry: Institut Français, 2005), pp. 5, 148. For a survey of Buddhist responses: Yuvraj Krishan, 'Buddhism and belief in *ātmā', Journal of the International Association for Buddhist Studies* 7 (1984): 117–35. His conclusion is that '[a]ll these new concepts or terms, *bhavaṅga*, *cittaviprayukta*, *avijñapti*, *prāpti*, *sarvabījaka*, etc., were, in my opinion, semantic inventions or coinings of new terminology to provide a carrier of karmas at the death of an individual. Their function was essentially similar to that of the *pudgala* of the Sarvāstivādins'.

[54] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 199–201.

should be if what matters in survival is psychological continuity rather than numerical identity.

The author of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra* brilliantly anticipates Parfit here. He tests our instincts, not by means of science fiction, but with a story from the Buddhist legends.[55] Here is his story:

In addition, there are circumstances where one wrongly conceives the idea of the 'I' with respect to another. Once a man who was ordered to go to some distant place, found himself passing the night in a deserted house. In the middle of the night a demon (*yakṣa*), who was carrying a dead man on his shoulders, came and set it down next to him. Then a second demon came along in pursuit of the first and began to angrily reproach him saying, 'That dead man belongs to me; why was it you who carried it here?' The first demon replied, 'It is my property, it's me who took it and I carried it off myself'. The second demon responded, 'It was really me who carried that dead man here'. The two demons, each taking hold of the corpse by a hand, fought over it. The first demon said, 'There is a man here whom we can interrogate'. The second demon then asked him, 'Who carried this dead man here?' The man thought to himself as follows: 'These two demons are very strong; whether I tell the truth or I lie, my death is certain; in neither case would I escape. How would it be good to lie?' He then declared that it was the first demon who had carried [the corpse].

Then the second demon, in a rage, grabbed him by the hand, tore it off and threw it to the ground. But the first demon took an arm of the corpse and attached it to him. In the same way he replaced the two arms, the two feet, the head and the sides of the body [with parts of the corpse]. Then the two demons together devoured the body of the man which they had replaced [with that of the corpse], and after wiping their mouths departed.

The man then reflected thus: 'The body that was born of my father and mother, I have seen with my own eyes being entirely devoured by those two demons. Now my present body is entirely constituted by the flesh of someone else. Do I quite clearly have a body, or do I no longer have a body? If I think I have one, it is entirely the body of another. If I think that in fact I don't have one, here is a

[55] It has recently been noted that there were also anticipations in eighteenth-century Britain. Specifically William Hazlitt's use of fission as a theological possibility; see Raymond Martin and John Barresi, *Naturalization of the Soul: Self and Personal Identity in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 147. Richard Sorabji has pointed to another early anticipation of Parfit: Origen's claim that one could survive resurrection in a numerically distinct body; see *The Philosophy of the Commentators*, vol. 3, p. 186; *Self: Ancient and Modern Insights*, chapter 3. For a discussion of Rāmānuja's comparable argument that one can survive re-embodiment, see Julius Lipner, *The Face of Truth: A Study of Meaning and Metaphysics in the Vedāntic Theology of Rāmānuja* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 78.

body that is perfectly visible.' When he had thus reflected, his mind grew greatly troubled and he became like someone who has lost their senses.

The next morning he returned to the road and departed. Arriving in a kingdom in a highly puzzled state, he saw a group of monks by a Buddhist stūpa; he didn't know what else to ask them than whether he existed or not. The monks asked, 'Who are you?' He responded, 'I don't really know, not even whether I am a person or I am a non-person.' He then told the assembly at length about what had happened. The monks then said, 'This man recognizes for himself the non-existence of the "I." He will easily attain the state of liberation.'

Addressing him, they said to him, 'Your corpus, from the beginning until today, has always lacked a self, and it is not that this has only now come to be the case. It is only because the four great elements are assembled together that you thought, "This is my corpus." Between your corpus at other times and that of today there is no difference.' The monks converted him to the Path. He severed his passions and became an *arhat*.[56]

The storyteller concludes that '[T]his is one of the circumstances where one can wrongly conceive the idea of an "I" with respect to something else [i.e. one's physical existence].' Our hapless victim learns the hard way how to let go of his attachments, both to his body and to the passions that its demands cause, to appreciate how many of his attachments are not really 'him' at all. We, as readers of the story, do not need to have our own bodies snatched from us to learn this lesson, for we are helped by the story to imagine it happening to us. As a moral exercise, reading the story leads us to a philosophical insight about ourselves, and that encourages us too to 'sever' our attachments and achieve peace of mind.

[56] *Traité*, pp. 738–40. I thank Anita Ganeri for first rendering this passage into English, and Mark Siderits for further help with the translation.

Appendices

Appendix A. Schopenhauer's conceptions of a concealed self

When Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) quotes the Upaniṣads, he does so from the Latin translation prepared by A. H. Anquetil-Dupperon in 1801 under the title *Oupnek'hat*, itself produced from a Persian translation commissioned by Dara Shukuh (1615–1659), great-grandson of the Moghul emperor Akbar.[1] Schopenhauer received a copy in late 1813 from the Orientalist Friedrich Majer, and he would later say that

> [w]ith the exception of the original text, it is the most profitable and sublime reading that is possible in the world; it has been the consolation of my life and will be that of my death.[2]

Far less taken by the efforts of other European Indologists, he added that, 'when I consider the impression made on me by the translations from Sanskrit of European scholars, apart from very few exceptions, then I am inclined to suspect that perhaps our Sanskrit scholars do not *understand* their texts any better than do the fifth-form boys of our own schools their Greek texts'.

Schopenhauer believed that the Upaniṣads give explicit voice to a truth that other mystics have been able to formulate only allegorically. He asserts:

> Mysticism in the widest sense is every guidance to the immediate consciousness of that to which neither perception nor conception, thus in general no knowledge extends . . . . The mystic starts from his inner, positive, individual experience, in which he finds himself to be the eternal and only being. But nothing of this is communicable . . . . Now it answers to this that my system when it reaches its highest point assumes a negative character, thus ends with a negation. It can here speak only of what is denied, given up: but of what is thereby won, what is laid hold of, it is obliged to denote as nothing . . . . For if something is none of all the things which we know, it is certainly for us, speaking generally, nothing. But it

[1] *Oupnek'hat (id est, Secretum tegendum),* translated from the Persian by A. H. Anquetil-Duperron (Paris: Levrault, 1801–02), 2 vols. Dara Shukuh's translation has the title *Sirr-i Akbar* ('The Greatest Veil'), from which Anquetil-Duperron's subtitle is derived.

[2] *Parerga and Paralipomena*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974a), vol. II, p. 397.

does not follow from this that it is abolutely nothing, that from every possible point of view and in every possible sense it must be nothing, but only that we are limited to a completely negative knowledge of it, which may very well lie in the limitation of our point of view. Now it is just here that the mystic proceeds positively, and therefore it is just from this point that nothing but mysticism remains. However, any one who wishes this kind of supplement to the negative knowledge to which alone philosophy can guide him will find it in its most beautiful and richest form in the *Oupnek'hat*.[3]

Schopenhauer certainly acknowledged the Upaniṣadic doctrine that the self could not itself become an object of representation:

[T]he subject knows itself only as a willer, not as a knower. Since the representing I, the subject of knowing, as the necessary correlate of all representations, is their condition, it can never itself become a representation or object; but of it holds the fine saying of the holy Upaniṣad: *id videndum non est: omnia videt; et id audiendum non est: omnia audit; sciendum non est: omnia scit; et intelligendum non est: omnia intelligit* [this is not something to be seen: it sees all; and it is not to be heard: it hears all; it is not to be known: it knows all; and it is not to be understood: it understands all].[4]

His famous metaphor for that doctrine is the eye that cannot see itself (a metaphor we have seen before, in AU 3.1–4):

That which precedes knowledge as its condition, whereby that knowledge first of all became possible, and hence its own basis, cannot be immediately grasped by knowledge, just as the eye cannot see itself.[5]

Our knowledge, like our eye, only sees outwards and not inwards, so that, when the knower tries to turn itself inwards, in order to know itself, it looks into a total darkness, falls into a complete void.[6]

Schopenhauer's reason for insisting on the noumenal character of the self was essentially the one Kant gives in his argument for the transcendental

[3] *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol. II, pp. 430–3.

[4] *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974b), p. 208. If we compare the Latin with the original Sanskrit of BU 3.7.23, there seems to have been some influence from BU 2.4.14, but otherwise the translation (through Persian) is remarkably intact. Olivelle's translation reads: 'He sees, but he can't be seen; he hears, but he can't be heard; he thinks, but he can't be thought of; he perceives, but he can't be perceived. Besides him, there is no one who sees, no one who hears, no one who thinks, and no one who perceives.' This should give some encouragement to modern translators of the Indian philosophical texts!

[5] *World as Will*, vol. II, p. 287.

[6] *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. II, p. 46.

subject, that 'I cannot know as an object that which I must presuppose in order to know any object' (*First Critique,* A402). Being a condition *for* experience, the self cannot be an object *of* experience. Schopenhauer differs from Kant in his understanding of the implication this has for our conception of the self. Unable to make sense of Kant's claim that the transcendental subject is the 'I think' that accompanies all thought, Schopenhauer says:

Kant's proposition: 'The *I think* must accompany all our representations,' is insufficient; for the 'I' is an unknown quantity, in other words, it is itself a mystery and a secret. What gives unity and sequence to consciousness, since, by pervading all the representations of consciousness, is its substratum, its permanent supporter, cannot itself be conditioned by consciousness, and therefore cannot be a representation. On the contrary, it must be the prius of consciousness .... This, I say is the will; it alone is unalterable and absolutely identical .... It is therefore the will that gives [consciousness] unity and holds its representation and ideas together, accompanying them, as it were, like a continuous ground-bass. Without it the intellect would have no more unity of consciousness than ... a convex mirror has, whose rays converge at an imaginary point behind its surface .... Fundamentally, it is the will that is spoken of whenever 'I' occurs in a judgement. Therefore, the will is the true and ultimate point of unity of consciousness.[7]

Schopenhauer believed that he had identified the Upaniṣadic self in his own conception of the will; indeed he said that it was only in deference to popular convention that he uses the term 'will' rather than 'brahman' or 'world soul'.[8] He claims that this self, precisely because it is not an object among others, is able to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, 'in the whole'. This *is*, for him, constitutive of mystical experience.[9] It was an idea later to be taken over by Wittgenstein: 'The view of the world *sub specie aeternitatis* is the view of it as a—limited—whole. The feeling of the world as a limited whole is the mystical feeling' (*Tractatus* 6.45). For both, this was the substance of ethics, a discipline which for Schopenhauer was, as Christopher Janaway summarizes, a matter of 'taking the right stance to the world as a whole, of viewing correctly the relation between self

[7] *World as Will*, vol. II, pp. 139–40.

[8] See Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*, translated from the German by Ewald Osers (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicholson, 1989), pp. 202–3.

[9] *World as Will*, vol. I, pp. 178–81, 389–91.

and world'.[10] These are ideas that clearly echo the idea of philosophy as a moral exercise, as we have examined it in both its Hellenistic and its Indian varieties.

Schopenhauer's claim that will and *brahman* are identical[11] requires a subtle adjustment of Upaniṣadic doctrine. For, first, when he says that, 'when the knower tries to turn itself inwards, in order to know itself, it looks into a total darkness, falls into a complete void', he does what the Upaniṣadic authors are careful not to do, namely bury the self so well it may never be found; he has mistaken Upaniṣadic reluctance for real ignorance. Katha 4.1, having said with Schopenhauer, 'The Self-existent One pierced the apertures outward, therefore, one looks out, and not into oneself', continues differently: 'A certain wise man in search of immortality, turned his sight inward and saw the self within.' That is no 'complete void': indeed, as we have seen, the Upaniṣadic sages, Yama, Indra and Yājñavalkya, are eventually coaxed into telling us what it is that we can discover, if only we look in the right way. Second, when Schopenhauer says of the Kantian 'I think', an 'I think' that accompanies all experience, that, 'the [Kantian] 'I' is an unknown quantity, in other words, it is itself a mystery and a secret', he is in fact expressing a doctrine much closer to that of the Upaniṣads than the doctrine of his own that he puts in its place. The Upaniṣadic self is to be found in the phenomenology of thinking, and not in any reduction to will.

Schopenhauer's seminal claim is that the thing-in-itself *is* the will: 'The thing-in-itself, this substratum of all phenomena, and therefore of the whole of Nature, is nothing but what we know directly and intimately as *the will*.'[12] His claims that the macrocosm and the microcosm are, therefore, identical, and that there is, strictly speaking, just one willing self, have Upaniṣadic counterparts, as does his statement that the self (which for him is the will and also the thing-in-itself) is concealed but accessible:

[10] Christopher Janaway, *Self and World in Schopenhauer's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 319.

[11] For further passages where the claim is made, see Moira Nicholls's excellent essay, 'The influences of eastern thought on Schopenhauer's doctrine of the thing-in-itself', in Christopher Janaway (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Schopenhauer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 171–212; reprinted in Alexander Lyon Macfie (ed.), *Eastern Influences on Western Philosophy: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 187–219. She remarks that '[t]he importance of these passages cannot be over-emphasised. For they illustrate Schopenhauer's desire to interpret the doctrine of the Vedas so that it accords with his own conception of the thing-in-itself as will' (p. 198, Mcfie).

[12] For this quotation and the next, see Nicholls, *Influences*.

And though no one can recognise the thing-in-itself through the veil of the forms of perception, on the other hand everyone carries this within himself, in fact he himself is it; hence in self-consciousness it must be in some way accessible to him, although still only conditionally.

It is well known that Schopenhauer undertook an extremely thorough reading of the available literature on Buddhism, beginning around 1818, the date of publication of the first volume of *World as Will*, and continuing throughout the rest of his life. In this book, I have identified two non-factualist accounts of self, the Upaniṣadic theory that the self is the hidden phenomenal periphery of conscious experience, and the Mādhyamika theory that a sense of self is constructed through the active appropriation of conscious experience. It is also well known that there is in Schopenhauer's work a tension between two apparently conflicting conceptions of the self; for in addition to the self that is will, Schopenhauer describes a 'knowing self'. The knowing self is 'a tertiary phenomenon. It is metaphysically dependent upon the presence of consciousness'.[13] It has been suggested that this knowing self is 'the pure form of the directedness of consciousness itself'.[14] My suggestion, and it is only that, is that the origin of Schopenhauer's twofold conception of the self lies in an attempt to synthesize, or else in a failure to appreciate the difference between, the two Indian non-factualist paradigms from which he drew inspiration.

How Upaniṣadic is the early Wittgenstein? His *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* bears the traces of his study of Schopenhauer. Wittgenstein took from Schopenhauer the idea that the self is not itself an object of representation, but could not follow Schopenhauer in his further identification of the self with will. He writes in his notebook:

> The I, the I, is what is deeply mysterious!
> The I is not an object.
> I objectively confront every object. But not the
> I … (*Notebooks 1914–16*, p. 80)

Wittgenstein's reason for considering the self not to be an object was not, however, Kant's. Rather, the 'metaphysical subject' is not itself an object because it is a limit on what is represented:

[13] Moira Nicholls, p. 216 (Mcfie). See also Janaway, *Self and World*.

[14] Richard E. Aquila, 'On the "Subjects" of Knowing and Willing and the "I" in Schopenhauer', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1993): 241–60.

5.631 There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world: rather, it is a limit of the world.

5.633 Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found? You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But you really do *not* see the eye.

The metaphysical subject is not an object in the world because it is a limit of the world, but its existence is revealed by the fact that the world is *my* world, a logical space in which I am at the centre because my language defines its topology and boundaries.

5.62 ... What the solipsist *means* is quite correct; only it cannot be said, but makes itself manifest.

The world is *my* world: this is manifest in the fact that the limits of *language* (of the only language I understand) mean the limits of *my* world.

The represented world 'shows' or manifests the self but does not represent it, just as my visual experience of a tree behind a wall makes manifest but does not represent my own spatial location. If the world is a mirror of my language, then what is not in the world but at its limit is inexpressible. It is the mystical:

6.5.22 There is indeed what is inexpressible. This shows itself. It is the mystical.

Of Wittgenstein's thought that the content of experience reveals the self without representing it, and of his identification of this with the mystical, there is no strong parallel in the Upaniṣadic conception of the mystical as attention to the phenomenal periphery of experience. For the Upaniṣadic thinker wanted us to discover the self in aspects of the *vehicle* of representation, whereas for Wittgenstein the self is discovered in what is left unsaid in the *content*. To attend to aspects of the content of experience, even to those aspects which the contents manifest but do not represent, is still, the Upaniṣadic thinker will say, to look out through the external apertures, and so to look in just the wrong place; to discover

the self, one must look within, into the phenomenal aspects of thinking itself.[15]

Appendix B. A secret doctrine about the self: what we are is made of what we do

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Yājñavalkya spoke of a secret doctrine, a hidden teaching not suitable for public dissemination. This was the doctrine of 'action' or *karma*, that we are made into what we are by the deeds we do:

''Yājñavalkya, tell me—when a man dies, and his speech disappears into fire, his breath into the wind, his sight into the sun, his mind into the moon, his hearing into the quarters, his physical body into the earth, his soul (*ātman*) into space, the hair of his body into plants, the hair of his head into trees, and his blood and semen into water—what happens to that person?'

Yājñavalkya replied: 'My friend, we cannot talk about this in public. Take my hand; let's go and discuss this in private.'

So they left and talked about it. And what did they talk about?—they talked about nothing but *karma* (action). And what did they praise?—they praised nothing but *karma*.

Yajñavalkya told him: 'A man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action' (*puṇyo puṇyena karmaṇā bhavati pāpaḥ pāpeneti*).

(BU 3.3.2)

Why was this doctrine propounded here, and why did it have to be kept secret? Is the idea of *karma* simply, as the nineteenth-century orientalists and colonial administrators would have us believe, a rationalization of existing social injustice? In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. I believe that the doctrine of *karma* is both a statement of the freedom of human agency and an explanation of how it can be that moral considerations can motivate those who grasp them. For the theory of *karma* is a counter to two alternative explanations of action and of our reasons for trying to act well.

[15] Nor do I find, as some have, an Upaniṣadic echo in Wittgenstein's comment: 'Only remember that the spirit of the snake, of the lion, is *your* spirit. For it is only from yourself that you are acquainted with a spirit at all.' *Notebooks 1914–16*, ed. G. H. von Wright and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961), p. 84. While superficially analogous to the 'hidden connection', the context of this remark is an extended reflection on Schopenhauer's cardinal claim that the will objectifies itself in empirical objects ('can I infer my spirit from my physiognomy?', as Wittgenstein puts it). There *is* a decidedly Upaniṣadic ring to Wittgenstein's statement 'The world is *my* world'—but the direction of fit is reversed.

One was a view held by the unorthodox ascetic Gośāla, the leader of the Ājīvakas. His doctrine was one of Fate or *niyati*, that everything happens exactly as it is predestined to happen, so that human action is ineffective and inconsequential. His views are recorded in the *Sūtra on the Fruits of the Homeless Life* (*Sāmaññaphala-sutta*), where the Buddha reports how various ascetic monks he had sought out answer the same question 'what are the rewards of an ascetic life?' Gośāla answers as follows::

There is no power in humans, no strength or force, no vigour or exertion. All beings, all living beings, all creatures, all that lives is without control, without power or strength, they experience the fixed course of pleasure and pain through the six kinds of rebirth .... Therefore there is no such thing as saying: 'By this discipline or practice or austerity or holy life I will bring my unripened kamma to fruition, or I will gradually make this unripened kamma go away.' Neither of these things is possible, because pleasure and pain have been measured out with a measure limited by the round of birth-and-rebirth, and there is neither increase nor decrease, neither excellence nor inferiority. Just as a ball of string when thrown runs till it is all unravelled, so fools and wise run on and circle round till they make an end of suffering.

(i 53–4; trans. Walshe, p. 95)[16]

This is a doctrine of 'non-action' (*akriyāvāda*). It is a denial that one has any responsibility for one's actions and is based on a denial that 'action', the result of reason-governed, deliberative choice, is possible at all. How should one live, then, if the idea that reason can be the guide of human action is a myth? The answer of Gośāla, the ascetic, was that one should withdraw, as far as it is possible, from the pretence of action at all, and live instead the life of a renunciate and forest-dweller.

Precisely the opposite conclusion was drawn by the second alternative to *karma* that I mentioned. This was the view of the materialist hedonists or Cārvāka philosophers of ancient India. They insist that there is no good or evil in the world but only rocks and stones, and that a man is nothing more than flesh and blood. The view is reported, again in the *Sūtra on the Fruits of the Homeless Life*, in the words of Kesakamalī:

Your Majesty, there is nothing given, bestowed, offered in sacrifice, there is no fruit or result of good or bad deeds, there is not this world or the next, there is

[16] *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*. Dīgha Nikāya 2 (i. 47–86). *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Maurice Walshe (Wisdom: Boston, 1995), pp. 91–110.

no mother or father, there are no spontaneously arisen beings, there are in the world no ascetics or Brahmins who have attained, who have perfectly practised, who proclaim this world and the next, having realised them by their own super-knowledge. This human being is composed of the four great elements, and when one dies the earth part reverts to earth, the water part to water, the fire part to fire, the air part to air, and the faculties pass away into space. They accompany the dead man with four bearers and the bier as a fifth, their footsteps are heard as far as the cremation-ground. There the bones whiten, the sacrifice ends in ashes. It is the idea of a fool to give this gift: the talk of those who preach a doctrine of survival is vain and false. Fools and wise, at the breaking-up of the body, are destroyed and perish, they do not exist after death.

(i 55; trans. Walshe, pp. 95–6)

There are no reasons to act morally because there are no moral reasons for action. As a hedonist, the Cārvāka allows that deliberative action is possible, but claims that only one thing can guide our deliberations, and that is how to maximize our pleasures in a material world. To such a moral sceptic, Candrakīrti has reminded us, the Buddha will say that there *is* a self! (chapter 4).

What is the alternative to fatalism and moral scepticism? It is to think, first of all, that there is such a thing as deliberative action, action governed by reason and reflection. And it is to believe, moreover, that in the course of such practical deliberation, the moral status of one's action is a salient and relevant consideration. If one is to counter the doctrines of fate and chance, what one needs to provide is an explanation of how it can be that there are moral motivations for action. And that was why the doctrine of *karma* was taught. It is offered as a simple and effective solution to a tricky problem. The *karma* doctrine 'requires that a man's own "character" be his own "destiny"'.[17] Each of his actions has its appropriate consequences. Those actions that are good, springing from a clear-sighted mind and a virtuous disposition, result in future happiness and well-being (*sukha*); actions that are bad, deriving from ignorance, greed and malice, produce only suffering and malcontent (*duḥkha*). And it is a matter of cardinal importance to the *karma* doctrine that the costs and benefits that necessarily follow from good and bad action are costs and benefits that accrue to the person who performs the act; that, to use the Sanskrit terminology, the *kartṛ* or 'agent'

[17] B. K. Matilal, *Ethics and Epics* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 414.

of the action (*karma*) is the self-same person as the *bhoktṛ* or 'enjoyer' of the result (*phala*). There is a substantive conception of justice built into the *karma* doctrine, one according to which it is unjust for me to suffer from your misdeeds (*kṛtanāśa*); or, equally, for you to benefit from my virtuous conduct (*akṛtāgama*).

On the face of it, what the doctrine of *karma* seems to state is that the world just is a just place, that each person's happiness is in proportion to their virtue, and that this is a result neither of divine intervention nor even of fluke, but is due instead to the inclusion of the moral order within the causal realm. But we must remember the origins of the theory in the problem of moral motivation. The real question is not whether or not the 'law of *karma*' is true (or better, whether or not *karma* really is a *law*), but how the *belief* that it is could function as a regulative principle in practical deliberation. In other words, the question we want to ask about *karma* is, what kind of reasons would someone have, who believed it to be true, to take moral incentives into account in their practical deliberations? (A question formulated with admirable clarity by Pierre Bayle; see Appendix C.)

From what we have just said it looks as though, if belief in *karma* provides any grounds for moral motivation, they will be grounds based primarily on self-interest. The doctrine of *karma* is a doctrine that appears to say, 'Look, you had better behave well, since you and you alone will suffer the consequences of your misbehaviour;' or else 'If you want to flourish and be happy, you must behave well.' That is to say, it is what Kant would call a hypothetical imperative, linking our means to our desired ends. It says that the best means to my own overall good is my own virtuous conduct. But for this to generate reasons to be virtuous two further principles have to be in the background. One is a principle of self-interest (or 'prudence'), that in my deliberations about what to do I should consider what will be in my overall long-term best interests. In other words, it tells me what kind of thing I should be aiming for in my actions, namely, my own happiness. The other principle is the principle that reason is 'instrumental'; that reason requires that we take the best means to our ends. To put it another way, the instrumental principle asserts that if one has a reason to pursue a particular end, then one has a reason to take the means to that end. So if, by the instrumental principle, I have reasons to take the best means to my ends, and if, by the principle of prudence, my ends ought to be those of

promoting my own overall good, then, by the law of *karma*, I have reasons to seek virtue in my conduct. If it were the case that compliance with moral principles is conducive to each individual's long-term self-interest, then the concern for morality is just a reflection of the natural concern human beings have for their own well-being.

One objection to the *karma* doctrine is simply that it is false to say that good conduct is the best means to one's own happiness or overall self-interest. Isn't it all too obvious that the good suffer and the wicked flourish? Can't I further my own interests better by sometimes cheating and lying, at least in a world in which most people behave well, just as I can get home faster by jumping the lights, assuming that everybody else will obey the rules (recall our discussion of the distinction between truth and utility in chapter 2)? The Indian solution came in the form of the doctrine of rebirth or transmigration, and with it the idea that sooner or later one will get the just deserts of one's deeds. But that does not really solve the problem so much as postpone it, for what we want are reasons for thinking that one will be punished for one's misdeeds or rewarded for one's virtues in this or any other life.

Consider now a second objection to the doctrine of *karma*, understood as an account of moral motivation. The objection is that the doctrine appears to foreclose the possibility of altruism, genuine moral concern for the interests of others. If my only interest in good action is prudential, what reasons can there be for furthering the well-being of others? One way to reply to this would be to show that each of us benefits from the existence of public goods, like peace and security and the general trustworthiness of others. Perhaps the observance of moral norms will further the availability of these goods, and so be conducive to one's own long-term overall good. Giving way to another car may not get me home faster, but if it encourages a general practice of considerate driving, that would be better for me in the long run. Perhaps something like this explains another puzzle of the *karma* doctrine: that it is upheld even in Buddhism, where altruism and compassion are regarded as the highest virtues. The four 'noble truths' taught by the Buddha assert, as we have seen, that suffering is the lot of human beings, that this suffering has a cause, that the suffering can be removed by eliminating its cause, and that among the causes of suffering are character vices like anger, greed and craving. The cultivation of a 'good' character, free from possessiveness or self-regard, is therefore the best means

to one's overall well-being, the minimization of one's suffering. In this sense, respecting the Dharma is conducive to the 'crossing-over'.

But how is the cultivation of selflessness compatible with the principle of self-interest implicit in the *karma* doctrine? The Buddha's solution was brilliant and simple: it was to deny that there is any deep metaphysical distinction between persons (see chapters 6 and 7). The principle of prudence is not denied but expanded, so that concern for the well-being of others and concern for that of oneself are not two distinct human ends, but rather one and the same. The Buddha's idea reconciles *karma* with altruism by extending the scope of what can properly be called 'self-interest'. A prudential theory of moral desert is thereby transformed into a moral foundation for altruistic action. In the hands of the Buddha, the doctrine of *karma* is preserved under a reorientation of its ethical implications. It is curious to see, however, how the Buddhist *denial* of self and the Upaniṣadic *universalization* of self partake in a common diagnosis of the origins of suffering, the roots of which in both cases are seen to lie with the erroneous idea that minds have real boundaries.

Appendix C. Echoes of enlightenment: Bayle and the Buddha

Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), the author of that plundered 'arsenal of the Enlightenment', the *Dictionaire historique et critique*,[18] is clearly referring to the Buddha when he tells the story of a certain 'Chinese sage Foe', in Note [B] to his celebrated entry on Spinoza :

At seventy nine years of age, being upon the point of death, he declared to his disciples that for the space of the forty years that he had preached to the world, he had not told them the truth; that he had concealed it under the veil of metaphors and figures; but that it was time now to declare it to them. 'There is nothing,' said he, 'to be inquired after, and on which one may place one's hopes, but nothingness and vacuum [*cum hiu* in the Chinese language], which is the first principle of all things.' ...

His method was the reason why his 'disciples divided his doctrine into two parts: one is outward, and is that which is publicly preached and taught; the other

[18] First published in 1697 and expanded in subsequent editions, the last of which was published in 1820–4 and ran to 16 vols. A complete English translation appeared in 1734–8 in 5 vols; it is the source for my quotations. Richard H. Popkin has published a new translation of selected entries: *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991).

is inward, which is carefully concealed from the vulgar, and discovered only to those who are initiated. The outward doctrine, which, as the Bonzes express it, 'is only like the wooden frame on which an arch is built, and that is afterwards removed, when the building is finished,' consists 1. In teaching that there is a real difference between good and evil, justice and injustice. 2. That there is another life wherein we shall be punished or rewarded for what they have done in this world. 3. That happiness may be obtained by thirty-two figures and four-score qualities. 4. That Foe or Xaca is a deity and the saviour of men, that he was born for their sake, out of compassion for the errors he saw them in, that he has expiated their sins, and that by virtue of his expiation they shall obtain salvation after death, and shall have a new and more happy rebirth in another world.' ' They add five moral precepts, and six works of mercy and threaten with damnation those who neglect their duties.

The inward doctrine, which is never imparted to the vulgar, because they ought to be kept to their duty by the fear of hell, and suchlike stories, as those Philosophers say, is however in their opinion, the solid and true one. It consists in laying down, as the principle end of all things, a certain vacuum and real nothingness.

Basing his account on reports from the Jesuit missionaries in China,[19] Bayle has been able to give a recognizable account of the distinction between non-definitive and definitive teachings; although, in the course of its travels, it seems to have acquired an esoteric quality. Bayle struggles, as anyone might, with the principle that all is vacuum, but remarks that:

I cannot believe that the Chinese take the word 'nothing' in its proper signification, and I fancy they understand it as people do when they say that there is nothing in an empty trunk.

That is not too far from the idea that entities are empty of *svabhāva*, an essence or 'own-being'. He continues by saying that by the word 'nothing' should not be understood 'what has no existence' but 'what has not the properties of sensible matter', and that it is perhaps not unlike the modern concept of space.

[19] Matteo Ricci, for example, lived in China from 1582 to 1610. Well before him, Marco Polo, travelling widely between 1275 and 1291, had provided a description of Buddhism. Earlier still, Buddhism was known in Europe through the early medieval tale of Barlaam and Josaphat, the name 'Josaphat' being, according to Pelliot, a corrupted form of *boddhisattva*. See Paul Pelliot, *Notes on Marco Polo* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1959–73, 3 vols), p. 750 ff.; s.v. Iosafat; J. W. de Jong, *A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1987), 2nd edn, pp. 6f.

In Note [L] to his sympathetic entry on John Maldonat (1534–82), the metaphysician who dared to think that reason could pronounce on the existence or non-existence of God, Bayle again discusses Buddhist ideas about concealment and nothingness, this time in relation to the soul:

> The most able missionaries of China ... maintain that the greatest part of *literati* there are atheists, and that they are idolaters only through dissimulation and hypocrisy; like many of the pagan philosophers, who adored the same idols with the common people, tho' they did not believe in any of them, as may be seen in Cicero and Seneca. The same missionaries inform us that these *literati* do not believe any thing to be spiritual ...

And again, in Note [A] to the entry 'Sommon-Codom', Bayle, mounting an elaborate defence of his principle that 'the belief of the existence of God without the belief of a providence cannot be an inducement to virtue nor a curb to vice', states that these same Chinese literati believe that nature has inseparably united, by a blind fatality, happiness with virtue, and misery with vice.

Bayle's claim that whether or not one believes in God, one must believe that there is a relationship between virtue and reward, has strong resonances with the Buddhist reading of the law of *karma* (see Appendix B). In his alleged atheism, and his affirmation of the reach of reason, there is in Bayle's Enlightenment more than an echo of Buddhist advice.

Pierre Bayle was also one of the French sources on whom David Hume (1711–76) relied while he was writing the *Treatise* at the Jesuit academy La Flèche; another was Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), who wrote a *Conversation between a Christian Philosopher and Chinese Philosopher*, published in 1708. So, although Hume famously said that '[i]t is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. It is not contrary to reason for me to choose my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an Indian, or person wholly unknown to me' (*Treatise* 2.3.3.6), it might nevertheless be the case that one Indian—the Buddha—was better known to him than he realized. As we have seen, a good deal of what is recorded in the *Dictionary* as 'Chinese' is, in fact, a description of the life and ideas of the Buddha, including descriptions of the emptiness of the notion of soul and the doctrine of *karma*. It remains a distinct possibility, therefore, that the origins of some of Hume's ideas, including the idea of the self as a bundle of perceptions, will

one day be traced backwards along the Silk Road to this 'person wholly unknown'.[20]

Appendix D. The practice of truth: Bhīṣma and Bernard Williams

I have argued that for the Indians, Hindu and Buddhist alike, truth is an intrinsic good and not simply an instrumental one. If it is an intrinsic good, however, does that imply that there can be nothing more to say in its defence, that its goodness is just a brute given? Or is there some way to explain why something is of intrinsic value without reducing that value to others? Bernard Williams has an extremely insightful discussion of the notion of an intrinsic value, and specifically of the idea that the value of truth is an intrinsic value.[21] He claims that for something to be an intrinsic good it must be stable under reflection, which requires that 'the agent has some materials in terms of which he can understand this value in relation to other values he holds, and this implies, in turn, that the intrinsic good, or rather the agent's relation to it, has an inner structure in terms of which it can be related to other goods'. He continues:

> For us to get clear about trustworthiness as an intrinsic good, we need to answer two kinds of question. First, we have to decide what disposition or set of dispositions trustworthiness is; as we might also say, what it needs to be . . . . Second, we have to see what those other values may be that surround trustworthiness, values that provide the structure in terms of which it can be reflectively understood . . . That [structure] has been differently understood in differing cultural circumstances. Everywhere, trustworthiness and its more particular applications such as that which concerns us, sincerity, have a broadly similar content—we know what we are talking about—and everywhere, it has to be related, psychologically, socially, and ethically, to some wider range of values. What those values are, however, varies from time to time and culture to culture, and the various versions cannot be discovered by general reflection . . . Sincerity has a history, and it is the deposit of this history that we encounter in thinking about the virtues of truth in our own life. This is why at a certain point philosophy needs to make way for history, or, as I prefer to say, to involve itself in it.

[20] A diffusion thesis is defended by Nolan Jacobson: 'The possibility of oriental influence in Hume's philosophy', *Philosophy East & West* 19 (1969): 17–37; reprinted in Alexander Lyon Macfie (ed.), *Eastern Influences on Western Philosophy: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), pp. 110–29.

[21] Bernard Williams, *Truth & Truthfulness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 92–3.

This is a manifesto for the cross-cultural study of value. It is extremely interesting, therefore, to find Yudhiṣṭhira asking precisely the two questions Williams says need to be asked, and to hear Bhīṣma answering by situating the value in question (here truth) within a framework of values and emotions that help to make sense of it as something of worth:

Yudhiṣṭhira said—When it comes to morality, the gods, the fathers and the sages all commend truth. I want to learn about truth—tell me about it, O Grandfather. What is the indicating mark of truth, O King, and how is it to be secured? What might truth obtain, and how? Tell me this.

(MB 12.156.1–2)

Bhīṣma said—Bhārata, mixing the moral duties of the four castes is not recommended, [yet] the truth is unchanged among all the castes. For the good, truth is always morally right, truth is the morality constant for all (*sanātana*). One ought to submit oneself to truth alone, for truth is the highest path. Moral duty is truth, as is austerity (*tapas*) and mental discipline (*yoga*); brahman is truth, constant for all. Truth, it is said, is a high ritual. On truth, everything stands. Having spoken thus of the customary forms of truth, I will now describe in sequence its indicating marks. And you must also hear about how truth is secured. Bhārata, among all people, truth is of thirteen kinds. Without doubt, truth is impartiality indeed, as well as self-control; it is freedom-from-envy, toleration, modesty, patience and freedom-from-spite; it is renunciation, contemplation, nobility, steadiness, perpetual calmness and non-violence—these, O King, are the thirteen aspects of truth. Truth is thus indeed imperishable, eternal and unchanging. Not in conflict with any moral duty, it is secured by means of mental discipline (*yoga*) [12.156.3–10] .... These thirteen forms are the several indicating marks of the one truth; they partake of, and they speak of, the truth, Bhārata. One cannot speak enough of the qualities of truth, and that is why the gods, the fathers and the sages commend truth. There is no higher morality than truth, nor a greater sin than falsehood. Truth is the foundation of morality; therefore, one should not suppress truth. From truth comes generosity, rituals with offerings, rituals with fire, the Vedas, and indeed everything else determinative of morality. Truth has been held in the balance against a thousand *aśvamedha* horse sacrifices, and truth indeed outweighed them.

(MB 12.156.22–26)

We have been accustomed, at least since Kant, to see the value of truth as grounded in a sense of respect for the autonomy of others; to deceive is to manipulate, and that is a way to treat others as a means to one's own advancement and not as ends in themselves. A more archaic conception

situates truth in a framework of ethical emotion: to be true to one's word is a matter of honour, and with dishonour comes public shame and private remorse. Bhīṣma here gives voice to a complex third structure of values and sentiments that ground a sense of the intrinsic value of truth. A different list in the *Bhagavadgītā* situates truthfulness within an even wider matrix of virtues:

> Fearlessness, inner purity, fortitude in the yoking of knowledge, liberality, self-control, sacrifice, vedic study (*svādhyāya*), austerity, uprightness, nonharming (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness, peacableness, relinquishment (*tyāga*), serenity, loyalty, compassion for creatures, lack of greed, gentleness, modesty, reliability (*acāpala*), vigour (*tejas*), patience, fortitude, purity, friendliness, and lack of too much pride comprise the divine complement of virtues of him who is born to it, Bhārata. Deceit, pride, too much self-esteem, irascibility, harshness, and ignorance are of him who is born to the demonic complement, Bhārata.
>
> (*Bhagavadgītā* 16. 1–4)

Not all the virtues in this wider matrix are virtues specifically involved in the maintenance of a practice of truth. Bernard Williams has classified the virtues of truth into two general categories—virtues of sincerity and virtues of accuracy. Sincerity is a disposition towards trustworthiness in speech, a reliability to do what one has said one will and say what one believes. Accuracy is a disposition towards honesty in belief, the promotion of forms of conduct that ensure that the beliefs one acquires are consistently correlated with the way things really are. Earlier in this book, I argued that a third virtue of truth needs recognition, which I called the virtue of receptivity (see chapter 2). This is the disposition to allow a truth, once believed, to have its full weight within the structure of one's mental space, the disposition to resist the insulation of belief. Receptivity and accuracy are the virtuous counterforms of concealment, and sincerity the counterform of manipulation.

Let us consider in more detail how each of the thirteen virtues listed by Bhīṣma comes to be a form of a virtue of truth. Helpfully, the text supplies definitions of the truth-related virtues:

(1) Impartiality (*samatā*). Impartiality is sameness as between what is good for oneself and what is bad for one's enemy, and is grounded in the elimination of both desire and aversion, love and hate (12.156.11).

(2) Self-control (*dama*). Self-control is constantly not to envy another, steadiness/fortitude and depth, freedom from fear and anger. It is acquired by knowledge (12.156.12).

(3) Freedom from envy (*amātsarya*). Freedom from envy was called by the wise generosity and dedication to one's duty. One becomes free from envy by constantly remaining with truth (12.156.13).

(4) Toleration (*kṣamā*). In the matter of toleration and intolerance, a good man tolerates entirely the agreeable as well as the disagreeable. It is acquired by a good man, possessing the truth (12.156.14).

(5) Modesty (*hrī*). Out of modesty, someone whose mind is tranquil does much that is good and does not boast. It is acquired by moral duty (12.156.15).

(6) Patience (*titikṣā*). Patience, also called forbearance (*kṣānti*), is that by which one tolerates for the sake of moral duty. It is acquired by steadiness/fortitude, and has as its purpose the encouragement of ordinary people (12.156.16).

(7) Renunciation (*tyāga*). Renunciation is the renunciation of both love and material possessions. For one who has cast off both attraction and aversion is there renunciation, and not for any other (12.156.17).

(8) Nobility (*āryatā*). He who exerts himself to do good deeds for creatures is said to be noble. It consists in freedom from passion, and is without a form [of its own] (12.156.18).

(9) Steadiness (*dhṛti*). Steadiness is that by which one remains unperturbed in pleasure as in pain. The wise man who wishes for his own good fortune should always cultivate it. One should always have toleration and then truth. The clever man who casts off joy and dread and anger acquires steadiness (12.156.19–20).

(10) Calmness (*sthira*) [no definition].

(11) Non-injury (*adroha*). Not injuring in action, thought or speech is a constant duty of a good man (12.156.21).

(12) Kindness or freedom from spite (*anugraha* or *anasūyatā*). Kindness too is a constant duty of a true and good person (12.156.21).

(13) Generosity (*dāna*). So too is generosity (12.156.21). (Note that the original list has contemplation, *dhyāna*, instead.)

Why is it these particular virtues that render intelligible the practice of truth within an Indian context? The underlying theme is that of the mind as unsettled by emotions like fear, anger, greed or even attachment and attraction. A mind thus wracked by strong emotion will place the satisfaction of desire above the determination of truth. The practice of truth makes sense only within a framework of virtues that puts great weight on steadiness of mind. The steady mind is the one that will be objective and impartial, unbiased by its own needs. In this Indian context, the practice of truth is strongly associated with the cultivation of a mind free from directive passions.[22] Once more it is receptivity which emerges as the cardinal virtue of truth, ahead of both accuracy and sincerity. When, then, might it be consistent with a practice of truth to conceal one's beliefs from others? It is when the disclosure would threaten the very stability of mind upon which the practice of truth rests. If this provides occasional justification for lies of concealment, it offers no justification for the manipulative lie. For to deceive someone by manipulation is to distort their relationship with the world, and that will always threaten to undermine the calmness and steadiness of mind upon which their retention of the practice of truth depends. To manipulate another with a lie is, in that sense, to harm their well-being. Concealment is a weapon of resistance, and is consistent with the maxim of not harming ('to reserve to a Mans Selfe, a faire Retreat', as Bacon put it). Manipulation is a weapon of aggression, and is not consistent with non-harm. Gandhi characterized the relationship between the maxim of not harming (*ahiṃsā*) and the practice of truth (*satyagraha*) as a means–ends relationship, and this captures some of what Williams meant in speaking of an 'inner structure'; but we should not think of the relationship in excessively instrumental terms, for what is in question is not how the practice is made, but how it is *made sense of*, and that is what preserves each of the virtues involved as itself an intrinsic good. Gandhi was right to identify in the ideas of *satyagraha* 'holding fast

[22] There are interesting affinities here with Stoic and Epicurean thought. See Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002a).

to the truth' and *ahiṃsā* 'non-harm' a pair of pan-Indian intrinsic values that support each other in achieving stability under reflection. Philosophy, argumentation and the practices of truth are also arts of the soul, ways of cultivating impartiality, self-control, steadiness, modesty, toleration and patience.

Texts and Abbreviations

A number of Sanskrit philosophical texts have been digitalized, and the number is growing. See GRETIL, the Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages, and indology.info's e-Text Archive of Indic Texts.

Early texts

Upaniṣads: Patrick Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: An Annotated Text and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Abbreviations used here follow Olivelle: Bṛhadāraṇyaka [BU], Chāndogya [CU], Taittirīya [TU], Aitareya [AU] and Kausītaki [KsU], Kena [KeU], Kaṭha [KaU], Īśā [IU], Śvetāśatara [SU], Muṇḍaka [MuU], Praśna [PU], Māṇḍūkya [MaU]; also excellent is Valerie J. Roebuck, *The Upaniṣads* (London: Penguin Books, 2003); A. H. Anquetil Duperron, *Oupnek'hat (id est, Secretum tegendum),* translated from the Persian (Paris: Levrault, 1801–02), 2 vols.

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Chronological Table of Main Thinkers and Texts

Many of the Indian dates given here are tentative, especially those of the early texts.

7th–6th cents. BCE	Upaniṣads: BU, CU
6th–5th cents.	Upaniṣads: TU, AU, KsU
	Democritus
4th cent.	The Buddha (d. 375–355)
	Plato (d. 347)
4th–1st cents.	Upaniṣads: KaU, KeU, IU, SU, MuU
3rd	Epicurus
2nd cent. BCE–2nd cent. CE	Hindu epic *Mahābhārata* (18 chapters, 74,000 verses, some much older).
	Buddhist *Nikāya* (Dīgha, Majjhima, Saṃyutta, Aṅguttara; probably composed after the reign of Aśoka 268–232 BCE).
1st cent. CE	Vaiśeṣika: Kaṇāda
	Stoics: Seneca, Epictetus,
	Platonist: Plutarch
2nd cent.	Naiyāyika: Gautama,
	Mādhyamikas: Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva
	Sceptic: Sextus Empiricus,
	Christian: Clement of Alexandria
3rd cent.	Manu
	Neoplatonists: Plotinus Porphyry
4th cent.	Naiyāyika: Vātsyāyana
	Ābhidharmikas: Vasubandhu, Saṃghabhadra
	Mādhyamika: *Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*
5th cent.	Neoplatonist: Proclus
6th cent.	Vijnānavādins: Dignāga, Dharmapāla
	Vaiśeṣika: Praśastapāda

7th cent.	Mādhyamika: Candrakīrti
	Buddhist Logician: Dharmakīrti,
	Mīmāṃsaka: Kumārila
	Vedāntins: Śaṅkara, Maṇḍanamiśra
8th cent.	Mādhyamika: Śāntideva
	Later Buddhist: Śāntarakṣita
9th cent.	Naiyāyika: Jayanta Bhaṭṭa
10th cent.	Naiyāyika: Bhāsarvajña
	Later Vaiśeṣikas: Śrīdharam, Vyomaśiva
	Śaiva: Rāmakaṇṭha
11th cent.	Later Buddhist: Ratnakīrti
	Śaiva: Abhinavagupta
	Islam: Avicenna (Ibn Sina)
12th cent.	Vedāntins: Śrīharṣa, Rāmānuja
	Islam: Averroës (Ibn Rushd)

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